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ABSTRACT

The papers in this booklet both share a growing concern that every aspect of reading instruction should make sense to the learner and focus attention on the way in which children comprehend what is required of them. The papers include "Effective Teachers of Reading Know Language and Children"; "ERIC/RCS Report: Jean's Influence on Dick and Jane," which examines the ideas of Jean Piaget on cognition and the reading process; "Reading: Linguistic Guide Lines"; "Politics and the Teaching of Reading"; "Oral Language and Learning to Read"; "Reading by Immersion: Assisted Reading"; "Whose Dialect for Beginning Readers?"; "Personalizing Reading Instruction"; "Read Much, But Not Too Many Books"; and "What's New in Reading: A Selected Bibliography." (RB)

What's New in Reading

Iris M. Tiedt, Editor

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of Teachers of English

Dear Reader,

There is I believe just one fundamental reason for the difficulty many children experience in learning to read; it is that they cannot make sense of the enterprise in which they are involved. The children do not comprehend what is required of them, see little relevance in the exercises and even less in the material. A widespread characteristic of older "poor readers" is their apparent expectation that nothing they try to read will make sense to them, or that comprehension should be the last concern.

Yet anything that makes no sense to a child is nonsense, both from the child's point of view and from a broader instructional perspective. Meaningless content and meaningless drills are harder to master, unlikely to be remembered, and almost certain to be useless if they are recalled.

Attention to the degree of sense that a child perceives in reading instruction is relatively new. Some instructional developers have made it a virtue that their programs are explicitly and deliberately nonsense, with no possible relation to anything a child might know already. If lack of comprehension is recognized as a handicap, it is often regarded as the fault of the learner.

The papers in this booklet share a growing concern that every aspect of reading instruction should make sense to the learner. Since in my view making sense practically guarantees that learning will take place, I sincerely hope that this booklet will make sense to every educator who reads it.

Sincerely,

Frank Smith

Frank Smith
The Ontario Institute for
Studies in Education

This booklet is part of a new FOCUS SERIES based on articles that have appeared in *Elementary English*. The series is designed especially for use with college classes to permit professors to focus on topics of particular interest in their various classes.

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Effective Teachers of Reading Know Language and Children

Kenneth S. Goodman

It is popular in modern educational groups, particularly those dealing with research, to cultivate objectivity by sticking very close to observable behavior without dealing with values, questioning assumptions, or probing beneath behavior to the underlying processes and competencies which produce it. Furthermore, educational speakers and writers seldom are direct in attacking specific programs and methods. While supporting my position on a base of sound research and theory, I do not claim that it is value free. Furthermore, I do not want you to draw the conclusion that in this position I am rejecting others. I wish to be explicit about what I reject and why.

My basic tenet is this: All children have immense language resources when they enter school. By understanding and respecting and building on the language competence of kids we can make literacy an extension of the natural language learning of children. Teachers must know and understand kids, their language and the reading process in order to bring this about.

If this position is valid then I must reject the position of those who treat children as defective adults, as deficient in language, as so many lumps of clay to be forced into a mold and reshaped as look-alike, think-alike, talk-alike robots. I must reject directly and unequivocally programs and practices which I believe threaten to create a new dark age in reading and language instruction.

If children are our concern then we are accountable ultimately only to them. Those who believe in kids must speak up in their defense. How can we face these kids, now, and later when they are grown, if we abandon them to the behavior modifiers, to the interveners in their lives who want to buy their souls for a handful of M and M's and win their parents' consent for a book of green stamps?

We've got to tell the operant conditioners and the contingency reinforcers that kids can learn like pigeons but pigeons can't learn like kids and that learning theories that try to reduce learning to read to bite-size pellets that pigeons can swallow are inappropriate and theoretically wrong and ultimately harmful to at least some kids. We've got to assert that if kids learn to read with these pigeon pecking programs, that's a tribute to the language learning competence of kids which makes it possible to overcome the absurdities of programs like Distar and BRL and learn to read anyway. Most children can learn in spite of such programs which fragment reading into sequences of measurable irrelevant trivia. But enough children suffer

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that I would like to see signs displayed all over the walls of the exhibit areas of professional conferences of groups like IRA and NCTE which say: "Caution: instructional materials displayed here may be injurious to the mental health of your pupils."

Following the initial commitment of this paper I'm going to state a series of key principles about reading and learning to read and will discuss these in relationship to some current practices and trends.

Reading Is Language. Reading is one of four language processes. Since literate societies have two alternate forms of language, that is, speech and writing, reading must be viewed as the receptive written language process, parallel to listening, the aural receptive process. Speech and writing are the productive processes.

Readers Are Users of Language. Readers are people who use this receptive process to construct meaning from written language. Reading is successful to the extent that readers can construct meaning. The writer encodes thoughts in language. The reader goes from language to thought. The reader decodes.

Reading Beginners Are Competent Language Users. When children learn to read their native language they bring to the task a competence in language which they use in listening and speaking. They can process an aural language sequence, get to its underlying structures, and construct meaning. They are limited in doing so successfully only to the extent that cognitive development and relative lack of experience limit them. They have mastered the system of language, its symbols, rules and patterns. If they lack vocabulary it is more a result of limited experience and cognitive development than a cause of lack of comprehension.

Every child, in every strata of every society learns well at least one language form, the one most useful for purposes of communication in the community. Only the most severely handicapped children are hindered in this achievement. Unfortunately, through ignorance and prejudice, a stereotype has developed of "linguistically deprived," "non-verbal," "culturally disadvantaged" children. Researchers and authoritative writers are not immune to elitism and racism. Ethnocentrism, a tendency to judge others by the extent to which they deviate from one's self, contaminates a good deal of the professional literature dealing with the language competence of low status children. The stereotype is a vicious one but not new to America nor restricted to poor Blacks or Appalachian whites. The "Dumb Swede," "Dumb Dutchman," "Stupid Pollack" stereotypes attest our willingness to equate difference with deficiency and assume that people who don't speak our own version of good English thereby demonstrate an inability to do so resulting from inferior ancestors or inadequate home environment, or some combination of both Compensatory education, through which we will help these unfortunate wretches to overcome their deficiencies and inadequacies and become as much like ourselves as is possible, considering the long way they have to come, is the solution offered for problems that don't exist.

Instead of this stereotype we must recognize the competence of children in their own language, whatever its social status. Literacy can become an extension of the existing language competence of the learner if we understand it and encourage children to rely on their language strength in learning to read.

Language Exists Only to Communicate Meaning. Language is an arbitrary code, a social invention, to meet the needs of its

users for communication. Apart from this purpose it becomes a set of abstractions. In its relationship to meaning it becomes, for its users, almost a part of the concrete world which it is used to represent and manipulate. Language learning when it is in this communicative context is like concrete learning. Learning to read requires relevant meaningful language in order for language users to make use of their existing language competence and of the meaning context in which language processes function.

Any attempt to reduce the complexity of language in reading by sorting out letters or word parts or words increases the complexity of the learning since it substitutes abstract language elements for meaningful language.

There is no need for extrinsic motivation in teaching reading such as raisins, green stamps, M and M's or grades. The motivation in all language learning is successful communication. Communicative need, the need to understand and be understood, is the driving force behind language learning. It is only when language is divorced from meaning or the meaning is irrelevant to the learner that extrinsic rewards are needed to spur learning. Furthermore such rewards work regardless of the value or validity of what is being learned. Behavior which ultimately interferes with successful reading may be fostered with extrinsic rewards since they do not relate to the process itself. One might safely conclude that the less soundly based on knowledge of language use and language learning a program is the more likely it is to require external rewards to keep the pupils involved.

There Is No Defensible Sequence of Skills in Reading Instruction. Since reading must, like all language processes, be always related to the communication of meaning, there is no time in reading acquisition when the reader may dispense with any aspects of the process that would result in the learner dealing with anything less than whole natural meaningful language. Only in its communicative use are all elements of the reading process in proper perspective. The actual importance of any letter, letter part, word or word part at any point in reading is totally dependent on all other elements and on the grammar and meaning of the language sequence.

Isolating and sequencing skills appeals to the logic of the adult literate as a means of being sure that the novice encounters and learns to control each thing that a proficient reader controls. But such sequencing was not a necessary prerequisite to the original language acquisition of the same learners. They learned to understand and be understood through oral language at an earlier age, with no prior language competence, and without the professional help of teachers. Imagine putting infants through a program where they were first taught sounds, then the blending of sounds into sound sequences, then production of words, then phrases, and then sentences, after which they were permitted to engage in meaningful purposeful discourse. Such a program would not foster language learning; it would yield large numbers of children who were candidates for remedial talking classes.

But children learn language because they encounter it whole and within the context of meaningful use in meaningful situations. Out of all the sensory input which bombards them and out of all the noise, both linguistic and non-linguistic they encounter, they are able to sort out language, relate it to the accompanying experience and reach the point at a tender age when they can easily express any thought they can think through utterances that they generate but have never heard before. It is absurd to think that these competent language us-

ers need to have the process of reading turned into an academic exercise in pseudo-scientific linguistic analysis. All they need to become as effective in reading as they are in listening is meaningful written language which they need and want to understand.

No researcher has ever been able to support any particular sequence of skill instruction as having any intrinsic merit which derives from linguistic or psycholinguistic analysis. All sequences are arbitrary, often frankly stated to be so by those who originally formulated them, though not always by later borrowers.

Accuracy in Reading Is Inconsequential. Successful readers are those who are most effective: they can construct a message which substantially agrees with the one the writer began with, and most efficient: they use the least amount of effort to achieve that end. Accuracy, correctly naming or identifying each word or word part in a graphic sequence, is not necessary for effective reading since the reader can get the meaning without accurate word identification. Furthermore, readers who strive for accuracy are likely to be inefficient. They use too much available graphic information since the amount of information needed to identify graphic elements far exceeds the amount needed to predict the underlying structure and construct a related meaning. Efficient readers sample from the distinctive features of the graphic display using only enough to make a useful prediction about the structure and the meaning. Then they sample again to confirm or contradict their predictions. Too careful reading becomes bogged down in detail so that meaning is lost. The too careful reader is like a driver who has not yet learned to sort out the realities which assault his or her senses which are needed to make effective decisions: when to stop, to speed up, to turn. Using all the available information is little better than using none. There is too much to sort and evaluate. An efficient driver predicts, anticipates and therefore is able to ignore the insignificant and capitalize on really significant information bearing cues.

Readers who are efficient and effective operate in much the same manner as such drivers. If they do make miscues they become aware of them only if they result in loss of meaning, since they are constantly monitoring the process for meaning. They are trying to comprehend, not say words. Furthermore, such readers know how to recover from significant miscues which do disrupt meaning and correct. Better readers don't just make fewer miscues they make better miscues. Their miscues are more likely to retain meaning and acceptable syntax. The process of reading is such that even very efficient readers make miscues. But efficient readers know how to recover meaning when miscues have caused a loss of meaning.

Reading Is a Single Process. In recent years some writers building on a few narrowly interpreted linguistic principles have argued that the teaching of reading could be divided into two parts; a code-emphasis stage during which the learner is taught to "crack the code" by matching graphic patterns at phonological ones and meaning-emphasis stage that would follow where the reader learns to comprehend. Such arguments are based on two key misconceptions.

The first is that oral language is not a code but written language is. Such a view is not consistent with linguistic reality. Both the phonological and graphic surface representations of language utilize arbitrary symbols systematically patterned by English grammar to represent meaning. Spoken language is no less a code than

written. Learning to *recode* from a graphic code to a sound code is not *decoding* which must result in going from code to meaning. Even in alphabetic writing systems, such as English uses, though the graphic system in origin relates to the phonemes and patterns of phonemes in oral language it becomes, in practical use, an alternate way of representing meaning.

The second misconception is that one can usefully separate concern for the aspects of the written code from the use made by the reader in reconstructing meaning. As indicated above, such a separation at best results in inefficient reading and at worst creates barriers to effective comprehension.

Behavior and Competence Are not the Same. There is rampant in education today a mindless empiricism largely based on behavioral learning theory that equates behavior with competence, that makes change in behavior the only defensible goal of instruction, and which asserts that all curriculum and instruction must be judged in terms of observable, measurable changes in behavior. I call this mindless empiricism because it accepts only what can be seen. Where would astrophysics be if Galileo had believed that? Science always starts with the observable but then it creates theories to explain the processes by which these phenomena are produced. Then the theories are tested against observable reality and either rejected or modified if they do not adequately explain and predict.

In reading instruction the goal is not to produce behavior in the form of performance on tests; the goal is comprehension. We seek readers to achieve a competence in reading which is both efficient and effective. We may use tests, or oral reading, or other performances as evidence of this competence, but we are never justified in saying that the performance we can observe and measure is the competence itself. In fact a pupil may be taught to perform well on tests of reading without acquiring reading competence. This is particularly true if the tests deal with sequenced skills and not reading comprehension. Children may learn to say letters or name words but not to construct meaning from written language. Only with a thorough understanding of the reading process and how it is used can one interpret behavior in reading to get insight into the strength of the reading process as it is being used.

Nuclear physics is based on a theory that Einstein developed on the basis of interpreting the behavior of the stars and planets. But it extended knowledge in directions which could not be confirmed until decades later through any observable and measurable phenomena. The theory of gravity that Newton developed was a basic tool in planning moon explorations. It required modifications when it was applied to the new conditions of the moon. But what would have been the fate of our first manned flight if we had relied only on observable phenomena in planning their trip? How many crews would have perished while we shot off rockets and watched where they went?

Theory in reading, built on a base of psycholinguistics, the study of the interrelationships of thought and language, has progressed to the point where it is possible to interpret reading behavior and even predict it. There is no justification to superficial focus on behavior without relating it to underlying competence.

Nor can we justify narrow behavioral objectives which reduce reading to a collection of measurable trivia and erroneously force onto the reading process an inappropriate sequence of isolated skills. Objectives in reading relate to the efficient, effective control over the process and a flexible competence in the use of reading to comprehend a wide range of written language.

If these objectives are not as finite and precise as the ones conjured up in the name of specificity then that is one more demonstration of the inappropriateness of behavioral learning theory to language learning.

Tests in Reading Are Anchors Against Progress. Reading tests in current use lag far behind current theoretical insights into reading and learning to read. They lag farther behind than practice and, particularly with the current emphasis on accountability which is equated with test performance serve to pull practice away from innovation and the application of new knowledge. Teachers teach to the test particularly if they and their schools are going to be judged by pupil performance on tests. Sound tests of reading performance would need to be built even more carefully on a modern theoretical base than methods and materials. They would need to be used by practitioners capable of interpreting performance to get at underlying competence.

Test markers are not going to provide adequate tests however until those on the market cease to be profitable. Even new tests are measured today by the degree to which they correlate with the older ones. Educators need to declare a moratorium on the use of reading tests until publishers get the cobwebs out of them. In the meantime the immense expense in time and money that goes into tests could be used for in-service education to provide teachers with the knowledge they need to assess pupil progress toward reading competence.

People not Technology. No new teacher-proof materials or child-proof machine is going to solve the problem of assuring all children become functionally literate. But teachers who believe in kids, who understand how language works and who can help kids capitalize on the language resources which they bring to school can solve the problem. We know now how reading works; we know how it is learned; we understand its uses and limitations better. And it turns out that the help kids need from school in acquiring literacy is assistance in using strengths they already have and resources they already possess.

John Hersey's Child Buyer is alive and well and doing business in every school house in America. He promises to teach kids to read, to raise their IQ's, to purify and cleanse them, and to modify their behavior so they'll be docile, obedient, and conformist. Are we on his side or that of the kids?

Helping Children to Read . . .

What is reading? How can we best help the child to read? These are essential questions to be considered today as new insights are being provided from the studies of psycholinguistics. "*Respond to what the child is trying to do.*" writes Frank Smith. The "motivation and the direction of learning to read can only come from the child, and he must look for the knowledge and skills that he needs only in the process of reading. Learning to read is a problem for the child to solve."

From: "Twelve Easy Ways to Make Learning to Read Difficult." *Psycholinguistics and Reading*, ed. Frank Smith (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1973), p. 195.

Jean's Influence on Dick and Jane

Sr. Rosemary Winkeljohann

Names, terms, and plans seem to come and go in education, but one name, Jean Piaget, has come to be quoted recently more than any other in the field of cognitive psychology. He has become a guiding light for some and a stumbling block for others. Over 350 Piagetian manuscripts were processed into the ERIC system in the past two years, indicating the extent of interest in his theories. Since many of these studies are applying the principles and postulates of Piaget to development of curriculum in language, reading, listening, and composition, it will be of value to a reading teacher to become acquainted with their messages.

Raven and Salzer in an article (ED 037 112) entitled "Piaget and Reading Instruction," advise students and teachers of reading to search among Piaget's findings for insights and clues which may apply to their problems in theory, research, and practices of reading development. "Piaget might be compared to an explorer who sets out to investigate unknown territories, but who ends up discovering a new continent." (Henry W. Maier, *Three Theories of Child Development*, New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1965, p. 80.)

In the development of a reading program or a language arts program, the psychological studies of Jean Piaget might well provide the kind of rationale which could give insights into helping students to develop consciously the perceptual and conceptual skills necessary for a more complete awareness of the mental experiences. The concern of Piaget is with internal mental organizational activities called *schema*. A schema is an internal organization that adapts and changes its structure to fit reality. The intelligence develops in a sequence of periods and stages that are related to age, or as Piaget says, "Schemas have a history; there is a mutual reaction between former experience and the present act of intelligence." Piaget concerns himself with studies and observations on understanding the mental processes called schema within the individual, rather than with the stimulus from environmental cues which are the major concerns of most learning theorists. Reading teachers should know that they turn to Piaget for ideas, not statistics. Piaget has often said in interviews, that he will not tell educators what they should do with his ideas because he is not an educator but a learning theorist.

Piaget tells us that there are four stages in the development of the student's central nervous system which affect his intellectual growth. The four periods of Piaget may be summarized as follows:

Sister Rosemary Winkeljohann is Associate Director of the ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills, NCTE headquarters at Urbana, Illinois. ERIC/RCS is sponsored by the National Council of Teachers of English in cooperation with the National Institute of Education, U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

(1) Sensorimotor Period (birth to age two)
It is at this age that the child's mind develops in the use of his senses and through motor activities. The child internalizes his perceptions and activities to create his view of the world. The child also develops language (vocabulary) and use of symbolic imagery.

(2) Preoperational Period (about age two to seven)
The child will, during this period, develop classifying, ordering, and transforming. The world of the child is full of sights and sounds which at first appear chaotic and confusing. From this chaos, the child must gradually create order. The child at this age is learning to distinguish among impressions that assail his senses. At this time the child develops an almost complete language system(s).

(3) Concrete-operational Period (about age seven to eleven)
As he slowly but surely gains mastery of himself and his environment, the child moves into the development of integrated structures, where thoughts may be considered as structural wholes. The stage of integrated structures is one in which he may do operations that are separate. In this process the child's thinking becomes reversible. He learns to conserve, to see that objects or quantities will remain the same despite changes made in their appearance. Conservation, as Piaget uses it, is the property of concrete operation, as well as the area of logical "groupings." In other words the child needs the ability to have the parts shifting but to mentally know the whole. Reversibility of thought thus is connected with collective conservation.

(4) Formal-operational Period (about age eleven to adulthood)
It is at this time that the child develops a value system and a sense of morality. The child now understands the logic of propositions and hypotheses.

There is further explanation of these periods and the development of language arts and reading programs in *Boston-Northampton Language Arts Programs* by James Wilsford. (ED 029 019, ED 021 930, ED 029 022, ED 027 946, ED 027 945.)

There appear to be three principal ways in which Piaget's theories may be applied to education. One is that the individual child's general intellectual development, special scholastic aptitude, and readiness for various kinds of instruction could be assessed. Second, curriculum planning could be done in the context of Piaget's developmental findings. Third, Piaget's theories could suggest the most favorable conditions for learning and hence how we should go about teaching. (Jerome Bruner, *The Process of Education*. New York: Vintage Books, p. 366.)

The challenge facing educators in the light of Piaget's findings, then, seems to come in the area of curriculum planning. Piaget has outlined stages of mental growth, has tried to help us understand mental process or schema, and has hinted at the maturation necessary. Piaget is addressing educators by asking us to stand back from our programs to see if we are developing "the right things at the right time."

This planning is dealt with in various places. In *Piaget in the Classroom* (ED 080 956), Schwebel and Raph discuss the role played by actions—children's manipulation of objects—in the development of intelligence, knowledge, and the act of reading. In the *Reading Process in the Perspective of Piagetian Theory* (ED 080 958), Haskell Cannon proposes a theoretical description of the reading process based on Piagetian concepts of mental functioning. We learn from this research the mental operations connected with spoken language and with reading printed language. In *Piaget's Theory of the Development of Concrete Logical Thinking: Implications for the Elementary Curriculum* (ED 080 937) by Maybelle Reid Newby, implications focus on operational thinking, learner participation, and social involvement. One of the recommendations proposed in this study is that teachers should evaluate the quality of thinking as well as the quality of data mastered, and

provide many concrete objects for manipulation and tasks for student inquiry. The study encourages teachers to look upon the process of reading as extremely important rather than to place more emphasis on developing a data base within the child.

Another study, *Children's Metalinguistic Concepts and Reading* by Walter MacGinitie (ED 078 391), assumes that although the pre-operational child generates syntactic utterances, it cannot be inferred that he can comprehend the process of analyzing or synthesizing words or utterances as specimens. It follows that trying to teach pre-operational children (ages two to seven) by decomposing words or sentences, on the assumption that words and the relation between words can be synthesized, may be analogous to trying to teach the relationship between money and Wall Street.

It was the purpose of the MacGinitie study to determine what reasoning tasks are performed in analyzing words in primers and first readers of several basal texts. The study indicated that children are not ready and that they have difficulty with rules (applying an abstraction to a concrete situation), but they were often able to do phonics lessons when the phonics lesson was an end in itself.

This study indicates that our beginning reading programs based on abstractions (phonics rules) do not correlate with the mental processes of which the child is capable at this age, as Piaget has outlined.

There have been materials developed which can aid the diagnostician in observing the progress of a child's mental development. The following study, *The Relationship Between Conservation Abilities on Selected Piagetian Tasks and Reading Ability* (ED 079 680) by Marilyn Jane Hurta, used the material called Piagetian Tasks and was to determine the relationship between the child's ability to conserve and his reading ability. Two groups of twenty-five children, ages 7.0 to 8.5, were selected as subjects. One group of children was classified as reading disabled and the other as non-reading disabled. Each child was administered the Concept Assessment Kit-Conservation, a standardization of Piagetian tasks, and the Durrell Analysis of Reading Difficulty. The Concept Assessment Kit measured conservation of two-dimensional space, number, substance, continuous quantity, weight, discontinuous quantity, length, and area. Each child was classified according to his level of function and his stage of development on all tasks. Classification for the level of functioning was either conserver, non-conserver, or at the transitional level. A Chi-squire value was calculated for each hypothesis formulated. The results supported the following conclusions:

(1) The only significant differences which exist between children classified as readers and those classified as disabled readers were found in the conservation of length on Task A and in the stage of development on all tasks administered.
(2) There appears to be a relationship between the child's level of functioning on specific conservation tasks and the specific reading sub-test of the Durrell Analysis.

"It is Piaget's genius for empathy with children, together with true intellectual genius, that has made him the outstanding child psychologist in the world today and one destined to stand beside Freud with respect to his contribution to psychology, education and related disciplines." So says David Elkind in *Giant* in the *Nursery-Jean Piaget*. David Elkind has been an advocate of Piaget's work since he spent a year studying at the Institute for Educational Science in Geneva. Elkind goes on to say, "Just as Freud's discoveries of unconscious motivation, infantile sexuality and the stages of psychosexual growth changed our ways of thinking about human personality,

so Piaget's discoveries of children's implicit philosophies, the construction of reality by the infant and the stages of mental development have altered our ways of thinking about human intelligence."

Another person helping us in education to understand Piaget is Eleanor Duckworth, who studied in Geneva at Piaget's Institute of Genetic Epistemology. She was Piaget's translator when he spoke at Cornell University and the University of California. She tells us that Piaget buys the adage that experience is a good teacher but that it keeps a dear school. Piaget says that experience is essential for intellectual development. But more than experience is required. The child must be active, must transform things, and must discover the structure of his own actions on the objects.

The implications of Piaget's theory and those of other investigations which have been influenced by him are stated by E. Burgess in *Values in Early Childhood Education*, a publication of the National Education Association, as follows:

(1) The importance of sensorimotor experience is underlined.
(2) Language, especially that which relates to labelling, categorizing, and expressing, is intimately tied to developing greater facility in thinking.
(3) New experiences are more readily assimilated when based on the familiar.
(4) Repeated exposure to a thing or an idea in different contexts contributes to the clarity and flexibility of a growing concept of thing or idea.
(5) Accelerated learning of abstract concepts without sufficient related experience may result in symbols without meaning.

Once teachers begin to look at children from the Piagetian perspective they can also appreciate his views with regard to the aims of education. "The principal goal of education," he once said, "is to create men who are capable of doing new things, not simply of repeating what other generations have done—men who are creative, inventive and discoverers. The second goal of education is to form minds which can be critical, can verify, and not accept everything they are offered. The great danger today is of slogans, collective opinions, ready-made trends of thoughts. We have to be able to resist individually, to criticize, to distinguish between what is proven and what is not. So we need pupils who are active, who learn early to find out by themselves, partly by their own spontaneous activity and partly through materials we set up for them; who learn early to tell what is verifiable and what is simply the first idea to come to them."

A Wealth of Materials for Reading . . .

"Along with television, films, filmstrips, video-tapes, and the like, there is today an amazing variety of material in print: picture books, some without text; easy-to-read books, invaluable for the beginning and the poor reader; poetry for and by children; folk literature that includes tales, myths, fables, epics, and legends; modern fanciful tales, ranging from imitations of folk tales to science fiction; historical fiction and biographies; animal stories, family stories (including the "problem stories"), realistic fiction about people of almost every land and every race; career stories and sports stories; informational books and how-to-do-it books. They are in every public and school library, in bookstores and drugstores, on supermarket racks and corner newsstands. There are reading kits, book-and-record sets, comic books and children's magazines—and a great deal of print meant for adults but read also by children."

From: *Children and Books* by May Hill Arbuthnot and Zena Sutherland, Scott, Foresman, 1972, 4th ed., p. 2.

Reading: Linguistic Guide Lines

Emmett Albert Betts

In 1933, Leonard Bloomfield's *Language*, a revised version of the 1914 *Introduction to the Study of Language*, presented structural linguistics to academic America. This unique contribution has influenced not only the direction of the study of language but also the teaching of speech, grammar, and reading.

Thirty years later, the publication of Fries's *Linguistics and Reading* (1962) followed by LeFevre's *Linguistics and the Teaching of Reading* (1964) directed attention to the phonemic basis of word perception and the intonation basis of both word perception and comprehension. These and other publications by linguists reflected in varying degrees Bloomfield's criticisms of reading instruction and his emphasis on regular spellings in beginning reading materials.

Although the relationships of phonemics, morphemics, and syntax to reading were not new to a few dedicated scholars, some educators with a messianic urge lined up behind the prestigious banner of linguistics and pursued this "innovation" with extreme unction. Satisfied with terminological inexactitude, they (1) talked about *the* linguistic approach, (2) overemphasized regularity of English orthography, (3) elevated the triad of relatively consistent vowel rules to the status of spelling patterns (e.g., *hot–hop, came–game, eat–cheap*), (4) became preoccupied with either phonemics or intonation to the exclusion of the other, (5) adopted a superficial notion of reading as a simple process of decoding writing into speech, and (6) espoused programs in need of sound learning theory.

Undoubtedly some of the penumbral gloom of linguistics and reading derives from different viewpoints of linguists, reading specialists, psychologists, philologists, philosophers, social scientists, anthropologists, information theorists, semanticists, orthographers, logicians, acoustic physicists, and others interested in this medium of communication. These scholars tend (1) to restrict their views to the problems in their own discipline, (2) to use special terminology which uncritically interpreted may produce mutual misunderstandings, (3) to commit themselves to one school of thought in their own field, and (4) to entertain simplistic notions regarding the stepchild called reading.

Teachers are concerned with three facets of instruction: motivation, perception, and thinking. The last two facets deal with language structure related to orthography, cognitive structure, different categories of meaning, regional speech and sub-dialects, and communication in general. Hence, they have a unique package of profound, multifaceted questions which require moderate alternative answers for evolving quality instruction. In short, reading specialists make

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use of relevant yields from diverse researches on verbal behavior—with reading processes which include, but transcend, linguistic processes.

Linguistics: Applied Values

Dedicated scholars exercising a voice of responsibility in reading instruction, have continued to ask rewarding questions about the contributions of different linguists.

Contributions of linguistics to reading instruction include:

1. A growing awareness of a need for courses in phonemics and grammar as one set of prerequisites for a course on reading methodology (These prerequisites are complementary to prerequisite psychology courses dealing with learning theory, perception, and thinking.)

2. A description of language—its phonemic grammatical aspects—an essential but not an all-inclusive basis for understanding reading processes

3. Concepts for studying language development and assessing achievement in the use of language

4. A distinction between the language code (speech sounds or the graphemes representing these sounds) and the message (But this dichotomy, involving the assigned role of meaning in a theory, can be a psychological trap in a rationale for reading instruction.)

5. An approach to (a) the assessment of linguistic prerequisites (e.g., speech production and grammar) for beginning reading instruction and (b) differentiation of instruction to insure preparation for initial reading

6. A systematic approach to the study of the relationships between phonemes and graphemes as one facet of the perceptual process (Studies of this orthographic dimension of reading instruction have spotlighted the futility of appiying phonic rules to the host of irregularly spelled words in beginning reading—e.g., *you, come, who, said*—and the need to validate an initial learning alphabet.)

7. Phonemic concepts for developing an initial teaching medium—an augmented alphabet (e.g., i.t.a.), spellings using the Roman alphabet (e.g., Godfrey Dewey's *World English*), diacritical markings (e.g., Edward Fry's DMS)

8. An impetus to the study of the discriminability and perceptual liabilities and assets of different alphabets for initial reading instruction, as one approach to reducing what Bloomfield called the "graphic eccentricities" of writing

9. A reduction of "noise" in the teaching of word-perception skills via understandings of regional speech and sub-dialects

10. An intonational basis for teaching word-perception skills and comprehension

11. An expansion of the concept of context clues—semantic structure vis-a-vis linguistic structure

12. An essential contrast of structural meaning with referential meaning, fundamental to teaching word-perception skills and reading by structures (cognitive structures shaped by linguistic structures)

13. An approach to the study of and accommodation to the language of culturally different individuals

14. A linguistic dimension to formulas for estimating the readability of instruction materials

15. A step forward to the evaluation of the concept that linguistics is fundamental to the theory of thinking—of Benjamin Whorf's concept of "linguistic relativity" (Thinking is relative to the language learned.)

16. New insight regarding the investigation of reading disabilities caused by brain lesion (dyslexia), especially syntactic aphasia

17. Theoretical constructs for research on

learning to read as one facet of language development

18. New concepts for researching the reading processes of reading achievers; e.g., the influence of syntactic structure on fixation pauses, eye-voice span, regressive movements, word perception, etc.

19. Theoretical constructs which facilitate an interdisciplinary approach to research on the reading process, particularly for a psycholinguistic approach

20. An increasing amount of significant research on the learning of phoneme-grapheme relationships, conducted by psycholinguistics in cooperation with teams of scholars including linguists and paralinguists (Note: The process of reading by structures at the grammar-cognition level have received less attention.)

Bases of Reading Instruction

Linguistics, psychology, sociology—all offer guidelines to the escalation of reading instruction. This discussion deals with one of the bases of reading instruction: linguistics.

One, but only one, of the prerequisites to understanding word-perception processes in reading is a "working" knowledge of phonemics (significant sounds of speech) and grammar.

A streamlined course in phonemics relevant to the needs of teachers permits an understanding of speech sounds related to spellings, syllable stress, and phrase stress plus a healthy respect for *different* dialects. Equally important, is a "working" knowledge of grammar, especially of intonation as the keystone of grammar and reading.

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A Good Reading Program . . .

1 Begins where the student is and permits progress at individual rates of speed
2 Guarantees success from the initial experiences
3 Stresses development of oral language skills and continues to be closely coordinated with the English program to avoid repetition, as in a well-planned phonological sequence
4 Teaches reading skills using reading material of interest to the child
5 Does not belabor the teaching of skills but moves quickly into a program of wide reading of literature with instruction in literary concepts
6 Uses multimedia to present information and to motivate reading
7 Extends abilities to think—analysis, comparison, criticism, comprehension
8 Experiments with varied approaches to meet individual needs incorporating the best of each approach to reading
9 Stimulates real interest in reading for pleasure and information; develops habits which will extend into adulthood
10 Develops research techniques and familiarity with library tools

From: *Contemporary English in the Elementary School*, by Iris M. Tiedt and Sidney W. Tiedt, Prentice-Hall, 1975, 2nd ed., p. 336.

Politics and the Teaching of Reading

William A. Jenkins

In that handy little book called *Reading: Process and Program*, Ken Goodman and Olive Niles define reading as "The complex process by which a reader reconstructs, to some degree, a message encoded by a writer in graphic language." This is a good guide for what the teacher should attempt to focus on in developing reading skills in children. However, the definition does not approach the activities of those who attempt to develop reading programs, train reading teachers, or develop reading materials. There are myriad activities unaccounted for by this definition which these professionals must undertake.

The woman teacher rightly views her activities as a moral enterprise. That is, she attempts to develop certain skills, certain patterns of thinking and certain ideas for the children in her class. Although she does promote certain modes of thinking and behavior in children, she probably does not consider her activities political. She is probably right. But I think those who are concerned with the larger dimensions of reading are and perhaps must be political in their activity. That is, they are concerned with the total complex of relationships among those who are in any way concerned with the teaching of reading. To cite one example, there are those who point out that less time in school is spent today on the teaching of reading than was spent 25 years ago. Such a fact is not assessed objectively to determine whether the decrease is justified. Rather, the decrease is frequently treated as a political matter and viewed as a denial of the child's birthright, almost as serious as disenfranchising him.

Those who educate teachers of reading frequently find themselves concerned with far more than familiarizing the neophyte with the processes of decoding, child learning, motivation, and evaluation of results. They find themselves enmeshed in a complex of relationships that run the gamut from competing reading systems to the high level economics of financing reading programs. This inclines them in their teaching activities almost to take the position of the man who trains technicians to cut hair and run a barber shop. It is reported that one of these men once said that if he were running a barber college, he would include a course in window dressing; he would bring in successful shop owners to tell the neophyte barbers how to beat the competition of other shops; he would include a course in how to cut prices without going bankrupt; how to persuade people not to patronize the shop across the street without committing libel; how to prepare an income tax re-

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turn without cheating, how to compete with other barber shop owners. And incidentally, he would teach them how to cut hair. There are those who believe that teaching teachers of reading involves equally far-ranging activities.

The position I take here is not the extreme position taken by Dr. Neil Postman, in his article called, "The Politics of Reading," which appeared in the *Harvard Educational Review* two years ago. His thesis was that it is immoral to teach children to get ideas primarily through the medium of print, because print is outmoded in our multi-media society. My thesis is that the teaching of reading is a many faceted enterprise, which requires knowledges ranging from economics to political science, and skills ranging from understanding the decoding process to writing an attractive grant proposal.

Without a doubt the school, defined in broadest terms, is a political institution. As such it must compete with other institutions in our society for recognition, financial support, and influence. This being so, it is not surprising that reading, one of the primary activities in this political institution, should itself be a political activity. Reading does have to compete with other areas in the curriculum for recognition, financial support and influence. For example, in attempting to get federal financial support from the U.S. Office of Education these days, reading must compete with USOE's current focus on teacher renewal activities and career education. The system apparently is closed to support for the subject reading, except in the Right to Read Effort. On the local level, Title I or Title IV funds, as a local option, can be used. But the question is, "Do we give our limited extraordinary support to reading or arithmetic or physical education?"

Closing the system, of course, invites a variety of machinations by those who would like federal support for the teaching of reading. They have only to look at how the process of curriculum change or at least curriculum emphasis in recent years has sprung out of political consideration.

The most startling of these was the curriculum emphasis which science and mathematics received after the Russians launched their first Sputnik more than a decade ago. If we also trace the emphases which have been placed on health education, compensatory education, education for the disadvantaged, drug education and, currently, career education, we find that to effect curriculum change does, indeed, appear to require political activity.

In the area of our discussion, reading, it seems very clear to me that the Right to Read Effort is definitely a political approach to the teaching of reading. The program has few funds. To succeed it will require missionary zeal in the recruitment of volunteers, and it has been given a wide community base, rather than a school base of operations. I for one find it difficult to believe that it can have impact on teaching children to read. Perhaps it will help remove adult illiteracy.

Many people say that competition is woven into the woof and warp of our life. They set up a syllogism to support their belief even though competition is viewed as destructive in many cultures. The syllogism goes like this: Education is preparation for life. Competition is a part of our life. Therefore, competition should be a part of education. They further justify their belief by showing that competition has brought us better cosmetics, better cabbages, and better cars. Therefore, they ask, why can it not bring us better results in the teaching of reading. They go even a step further and say that children in our society are conditioned to competition. Children learn to compete in Little League. They get it in art and essay contests. They get it

in Junior Olympics. And they get competition in Pop Warner football. Why not in reading? The very desirable ends, they say, justify whatever means are necessary to achieve them.

Frequently reading, like politics, is equated with happiness. We make the assumption that if a child has not learned to read, he will be an unhappy individual. We overlook the fact that wanting to learn to read is neither inherent nor God-given. One wants to learn to read because he sees reasons for reading, or his environment creates in him the expectation that he will learn to read and he will need it.

As teachers, we make the political decision that the child will learn to read. In doing so, we do more than develop in him certain skills. We affect the total configuration of his personality. To go one step further, we make the decision that deviancy in not learning to read will not be tolerated. We make the decision that if necessary the child's background and his cultural mores will be ignored. He and his parents are expected to accept a value, a political judgment, which says that reading is important and, therefore, he must learn to read.

If the child's experiences do not lead him naturally to reading, we say he is a problem. If he belongs to a discernible racial or cultural group, we lump him together with his fellows. For example, we indicate that there are certain problems in teaching Spanish-Americans to learn to read, overlooking the fact that their backgrounds may be Cuban, Puerto Rican, or Mexican. Each of these groups has particular linguistics and cultural differences. We treat Blacks as a monolith. In viewing the way in which the linguistic problems of Indians interfere with learning to read, we lump all Indians together and treat them as if there were one Indian language. In the name of education we permit the school to do things to, for, with and against children because our political orientation says it is good for them. We go to extremes to prevent failure—especially in reading. We take extreme measures to insure children success. And we manipulate them to let them gain recognition. All of this is to achieve the end of learning.

We also promote certain dangerous ideas. For our own political gain, the methods we use must be innovative. No one willingly employs anachronistic teaching approaches. Our teaching methods, likewise, must always be creative. It is immoral, we say, for them to be mundane. And what we teach must by all means be relevant. No one willingly and knowingly admits that what he is teaching is irrelevant.

There is ample evidence to show that no one method or approach to beginning reading is effective with all children. And yet for a variety of reasons, teachers of reading make a leap of faith which insists that, for example, only the sight method will work in teaching beginning reading. It would be apolitical to admit that we have preferences for one method or another because they work for us, but not to claim that they are better.

During the period 1965-68, the NDEA programs spent 13 million dollars to improve the quality of reading taught by 8,293 teachers. The average expenditure was something over $1500. To get approval for including reading under NDEA required political activity in the first place. To continue the program for a period of 4 years also required political activities. And, finally, even though less than 1% of the teachers in the country who teach reading benefitted from this program, without evidence it was decided that the program had been a failure. The judgment was made that no improvement in general reading ability in the country had been made and therefore the program should be discontinued.

NDEA institutes in reading were superseded by the Right to Read Effort. A different political-educational point of view held that it was necessary to marshall the efforts of those who teach reading and the efforts of the community. To succeed, it was felt, a missionary zeal about teaching reading, would foreordain success. I don't think it will. Moreover, the whole approach is anathema to me. I find it immoral to equate the improving of general reading ability in our country, with the attracting of volunteers for VISTA and the Peace Corps. I think it is Machiavellian to substitute missionary zeal for financial support. The demand that the schools obtain an optimum level of performance and the insistence that the schools retain accountability, make the entire enterprise highly questionable, in my view.

The politics of reading are also expressed in monetary terms. The availability of instructional materials, the choice of textbooks that are to be used, the age and condition of the textbooks are all decided by the amount of money available to the schools. While these essential ingredients can vary greatly, the standard of reading achievement demanded of those who teach in the schools does not vary, except to increase.

The amount of political activity that goes into state-wide adoption of texts in 21 of our states is indeed fantastic. Frequently the bases for adopting a text are related neither to the teaching of reading nor to the merit of the books themselves.

To cite another example, Title I funds have for several years been heralded as a boon to local education. The fact is, though, that Title I funds provide an average of only $100 to upgrade each child's education rather than the generally accorded $300 minimum, a sum which would truly make a difference in his education.

To be fair about the matter, questions which face educators about the teaching of reading frequently are without answers, except political answers. For example, if you locate a reading center in a city and you have funds to create only one center, do you place it in the ghetto as a convenience to those who need it most? If you do, are you being segregationist? If funds are limited to creating only one reading center, do you put the center where results are assured, since you are accountable, or do you place it where results are very doubtful because the children are so far below the mean? When you can fund only one district with Title I money, but there are several which are deserving of this extra support, how do you decide where to place the funds?

The politics of the teaching of reading prompt me to feel that as teachers and teacher educators we have heretofore been incredibly naive. And, as we face the problem of teaching reading in the future, using our old, non-political approaches, in a situation which apparently grows more political every day, our helplessness will increase, perhaps in direct proportion to the measures of accountability which are applied to us.

Let me end with an apocryphal story. It seems that an engineer, a doctor and a politician were arguing about whose profession was the oldest. The doctor said that, of course, medicine was the oldest, that mankind has always had physicians, that they were even mentioned in the Bible.

"That's nothing," said the engineer. "The Bible tells us how the world was created out of chaos, and how could there be any order brought out of chaos without an engineer to help?"

Whereupon the politician broke in. "Wait a minute," he said. "*Who* do you think created the chaos?"

Oral Language and Learning to Read

Robert Emans

In discussing curriculum matters, the problem with some statements made is not that they are invalid, but that they are valid. An invalid statement can be challenged, discussed, and changed. For example, the statement that "reading is unrelated to oral language" would bring cries of protest from most readers. Arguments as to why reading and oral language are related would stimulate thoughtful reactions. In such a debate understanding is likely to grow. However, a valid statement, since it requires no challenge, may be accepted without probing more deeply into its assumptions and implications. Statements such as "reading is one of the language arts," or that "reading is not only language related but involves language itself," would elicit from most people only nods of consent. There would be no argument. The discussion would be closed. This is unfortunate because a critical analysis of the meaning of such statements would require that we attend to their implications for helping the child learn to read.

My hope is that you will receive this paper from a frame of mind of questioning the assumptions and implications of its point of view about reading instruction. Only in such a way will we all grow in understanding of this vital issue. Let us explore how knowing about oral language acquisition may be applied to the teaching of reading. Such an exploration is fraught with danger. Because we have little precise empirical evidence to guide us, we must proceed analogically. Much of what is known about how the child acquires language is learned from studying very young children, from infancy to the age of six or seven. When most of us think about teaching children to read we think about children from ages six and up. Care has to be taken not to generalize inappropriately from one age level to another for it is now recognized that the quality of thinking of younger and older children is both the same and different. How it is the same and how it is different are immensely important for instructional programs. However, much has been learned about many aspects of human learning by studying the behavior of lower animal forms such as rats, monkeys, pigeons, and pigs. Some perspectives on how older children learn can be found by studying how certain behaviors such as language are learned by younger children.

One of the ways of reducing the risk of making inappropriate generalizations arrived at from a knowledge of oral language acquisition to learning to read is to examine how people learn in general. Both language and reading are, to a considerable degree, learned. To the extent that a knowledge

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of how children learn language parallels a knowledge of how children learn in general, such knowledge should provide an orientation as to how children learn to read. Let us, therefore, discuss briefly learning in general, learning oral language, and learning to read.

Before we get into the heart of our discussion let us make a rather obvious observation, which is that most children do learn to read. The significance of such an observation is that children learn to read even when different instructional methods are used. Because of this it is sometimes concluded that the kind of reading method used in instruction makes no difference to reading achievement or that the only important factor in the instructional situation that matters is the individual teacher. We are not here to discuss such conclusions, although it is known that both method and teacher characteristics do influence reading achievement. What is probably most significant is that we propose the interpretation that the child will learn to read with most methods and most teachers by virtue of the fact that he has innate capacities to select sufficient information from whatever is prepared for him so he can discover the regularities of written language. Learning to read is representative of learning in general.

One way of viewing learning is from the viewpoint of the Behaviorist. Essentially Behaviorists see learning occurring as a result of the impact of the environment on the individual. Sensory impressions of external stimuli are added in the mind one to the other, according to the circumstances of their occurrence and to chance activity of the organism. The mind is built up by the connection and addition of atomistic sensory impressions of external stimuli. Thus, the individual is passive in his learning and is subject to the stimuli of the environment.

Gestaltists view the mind as having an innate capacity to organize the data of perception and thought. This ability to organize means that the organism is active in relation to the sensory impressions received from the environment. The individual is innately able to perceive relationships and patterns of the events in environment. Inappropriate learning results when the interactive environment is insufficient. The organizing capacities of the mind take specific forms which are structures built into the human to operate automatically. The forms bear a resemblance in function, although not in origin, to the schemata of Piaget who also sees the human as innately predisposed to learn through interaction with the environment. However, Piaget sees the individual not only as learning about relationships and patterns and growing in knowledge, but also as being in the process of building in his own mind the structures of thought which the Gestaltists believe are innately acquired. For Piaget, inappropriate performance, or errors, are indicative of the mental activity of the building of the structures of the mind. Earliest learnings, being tied to the self impressions and the activities of the self, do not take account of relationships and patterns which occur independently of the self. Intelligent perception and thought must wait upon the development of structures of self consciousness and objectivity in dealing with the sensory data arising through encounters with the environment. The structure of mature or intelligent thought can only be achieved through a process resulting from continuing interactions with the environment over time. The child will eventually build within his own mind a reasonably accurate picture of the events of the real world and their relationships. It can, therefore, be concluded that the environment with which the child interacts must bear a valid relationship to the real world. The environment must provide the

model of events and relationships from which the child is building his mind and against which he actively checks his knowledge and the suitability of his developing structures. In such a way the external world guides and directs the child's thought and action toward an eventual match. The mental structures finally developed in the mind do not result in automatic perception or central organization of the data of sensory impressions in the Gestalt sense. Instead, they provide the individual with an immensely flexible system for analyzing and reorganizing such impressions and for the varying of activity so as to reveal new information about the real world.

Let us now relate what we have said about learning in general to language acquisition. Like Piaget, linguists such as Chomsky believe that all mankind has innate capacities which predispose them to behave as well as to organize impressions of the events of the real world according to their meaning and significance. Impressive support for this evidence is that the child can learn any of the world's languages because he spontaneously emits the sounds of all languages. Research evidence can be found that language is not learned through a kind of non-critical passive imitation. On the contrary, the child is active in inducing his language from his environment. Neither is language learned by piecing together small units into larger units. As is described by the developmental psycholinguists in regard to learning in general, language is learned by selecting, differentiating, and elaborating from earlier forms. The child makes generalizations which become refined as he checks out his earlier assumptions against the samples displayed in his own language environment. What appears to the adult as errors in the young child's speech are actually global generalizations which have not, as yet, been refined. If the child did not learn language through an inner process of generalizations he could not apply what he has learned in one situation to another. Learning generalizations is what allows him to have commonalities with someone else, permitting communication. Let us take an example. The infant produces human sounds. The child explores producing these sounds by contrasting them, producing first one and then the other. He refines the sounds by focusing on the differences and developing independent categories for these different sounds. As he interacts with his linguistic environment he matches the various sounds he already can produce with the commonalities or generalizations he notices in what he hears. Eventually he drops the sounds he does not hear. Sentence structures and word meanings are learned in much the same way.

Mothers play an important role in language acquisition. An understanding of this role sheds much light on how the child learns language and has possible implications for the teaching of reading. Mothers tailor-make the language environment of their children. Their language is simplified, but consistent, grammatical, and their sentences are complete. The mother's language is at only a slightly higher level than the child is able to produce himself. The child selects from this restricted language aspects or interests to him on which to concentrate his attention. Thus, the child is exposed to a proper sampling of the whole of language. He selects aspects of the whole to work on at any particular time. Which aspect the child chooses is largely dependent upon the interests of the individual child within the limitations of his growth pattern. The focus and emphasis and the extent of shifting varies from child to child as he masters intonation, sentence structure, and phraseology. The child learns by forming approximate generalizations and testing them out against the language the mother provides.

If his generalizations are incorrect he reorganizes and begins new global approximations. He then reacts with new discriminations from now expanded schema to additional samples of language. Exceptions to broad generalizations are differentiated through reacting to an ever increasingly larger and more complex sample of the mother's language, which in normal conditions she expands to keep just one step ahead of her child.

Let us now relate what has been discussed above, in respect to learning in general and language acquisition, to learning to read. Reading is a process of obtaining meaning from signs and symbols. The child has received meaning from signs for most of his life, e.g., the sign of anger or pleasure in his mother's face, the signs that summer is turning into autumn, the signs that a holiday or a birthday is coming. Gradually the child learns that symbols can replace signs to convey meaning, such as knowing that a picture of a jack-o-lantern (as opposed to a real jack-o-lantern) signals Halloween, or the outline of a hatchet refers to Washington's birthday. Eventually, the child will learn that printed words are symbols for meanings conveyed through oral language, and later, that letters represent sounds. The child needs many experiences in discovering meanings referred to by many different types of signs and symbols.

Parents and teachers have long recognized the importance of reading to children. The child needs to know that understanding, information and pleasure can come from printed words. Children need to have many opportunities to hear written materials read to them. Such materials need to deal with events with which the child has had direct and recent experience to allow him to discover that written words can have meaning for him. The material needs to be planned as to content and structure, much as the mother restricts the oral language environment of her child to the events of the interactive experiences of the present and to what the child is capable of grasping.

Having provided above a general statement of how a child learns using language learning as a model, let us now explore the implications of this statement for a developmentally appropriate reading program. The above discussion implies that we adhere to the following principles in a program of reading instruction.

I. *Materials for reading instruction must provide a selection of developmentally graded but representative samples of the whole of written language.*

Just as the child acquires his oral language by reacting to the language environment as a whole, the child needs to interact with a reading environment which displays properties of wholeness. Children have a hard time learning to read effectively if they are taught isolated skills to be pieced together just as they do not learn language by piecing together small units.

The understanding of written materials and the writing of language is a complex task. The child must achieve concepts and meaning as he finds regularities in shifting patterns of letters, precision in specific form identification, grapheme-phoneme correspondences, and sentence pattern consistencies. He must also develop an understanding of the action or events referred to by the written language.

II. *Reading teachers must recognize that written language is a complex medium encompassing a number of perceptibly patterned parts.*

As the child selects first one aspect and then another of the complex reading activity to focus on, the teacher must provide

materials and action opportunities for the child to discover the regularities of the component parts of the complex activity of reading. We must provide opportunities for the child to use, expand and check out his mastery of each perceptible aspect of written materials. We must encourage and support the child's shifting focus on first one aspect and then another of written language recognizing that he is the only judge of his sorting and categorizing process and the information he requires. The child may at one time or another focus on a perceptibly independent patterned part to work on, but, because it is selected from the whole and constantly rediscovered in the whole, he will in time seek to discover its relation to the whole. He will be drawn to master the whole of the complex activity which he is reading. The teacher must recognize that over time the child will put it together so that it exists in a usable form for him in the written language environment.

III. *Motivation arises when the information in the environment is slightly different from that which the child already knows.*

According to Piaget, motivation results from an imbalance between what the individual receives through his senses and the concept of the external world which he has internalized. The individual is uncomfortable when such an imbalance exists. He takes actions to rearrange the world (literally) and, therefore, his concepts of it in order to correct the imbalance. The child will be motivated to learn if he can find opportunities to discover in the environment the kind of information he needs to clarify his concepts. External rewards can shape observable behaviors. However, learning, which requires the reshaping of concepts, occurs when the child finds available for his use information in the environment which, when internalized, brings his concepts into balance with the external world. Both repetition and the too different discourage learning. Reading materials, in order to motivate learning, being complex in composition, must be planned to display concepts which are only slightly different from those the child already knows. Thus, the general principle for all learning which is that of starting instruction close to the child's own level must be understood as an imperative and as a complex phenomenon.

IV. *Children will learn to read when the environment is graded and patterned to support their discovery of the regularities of written language.*

The child learns by testing out his conception of the world through his encounters with it. He needs to discover when his generalizations and discriminations work, i.e. when they are useful for him in solving problems, e.g. understanding a story, unlocking a word or receiving an answer to an attempted question. The child achieves his generalizations by discovering the actual regularities of his environment. The process is one of beginning with undifferentiated generalizations which are not useful in problem solving and, therefore, lead him to make discriminations as to events which are the same and different. In this way, over time he achieves increasingly more precise generalizations. Even written English, which has many apparent irregularities, displays regularities which can be learned. If this were not true no one could learn to read.

From the above, it is apparent that if a child makes an inappropriate response it is because he has failed to form a proper generalization. For the teacher to merely tell the child the appropriate response does not help him for an isolated bit of information does not build a mental concept. The teacher must instead provide a larger sample of the environment in which the concept

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Reading by Immersion: Assisted Reading

Kenneth Hoskisson
Bernadette Krohm

Children learn to speak the language in which they are immersed. In learning to speak, a child reconstructs the grammar of a particular speech community and formulates the semantic relationships with the real world, the internal conceptual and linguistic relations of an abstract world, the syntactic patterns of grammar, and the phonological rules by which meaning is communicated through speech. The remarkable aspect of this linguistic feat is that it occurs without formal instruction in speaking. Children acquire language as they informally discover the relations that exist linguistically between the surface structure (the syntactic structure and the sound shape of the primary linguistic data heard) and the universal aspects of its deep structure (the abstract underlying structure that determines the semantic interpretation of the linguistic data). A child apparently learns to speak by talking with others and making appropriate adjustments in the grammatical system by means of feedback received through this interaction.

This raises the question, can a child who has learned to speak and has no specific learning disability learn to read without formal instruction? Put another way, can a child learn to read by being assisted in a manner similar to that in which he learned to speak? Carroll (1965) suggests that:

> the child who is frequently read to while he follows the line of print with his eyes is in effect being presented with an experience which is not unlike the situation in which he learned his native language. The similarity consists in the fact that the child is constantly and successively being presented with a full variety of language stimuli, spoken utterances and their referents in one case, and printed words and their spoken counterparts in the other. The language learner picks out those spoken language elements that he can handle at any particular stage, and likewise, the beginning reader picks out those printed language stimuli that he can interpret at any given stage.

To answer the above question ways must be found to immerse children in reading as they are immersed in the language of a speech community. Since a child can process spoken language only by hearing the language, by asking about words, and by having words explained, a child who is learning to read needs to process written language by seeing the words and having them pronounced in a reading situation. Children should also be able to comprehend any written material they read if they can understand the same material when it is read to them. No attempt, however, is being proposed to do away with formal instruction in reading but rather to explore

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the plausibility of adding an informal dimension to any reading program in the form of assisted reading, i.e., while children are reading, words are identified for them as fast as they need them to make the reading of a story as smooth and enjoyable as possible.

The assisted reading approach may indicate, however, that informal immersion in reading can be an effective means of providing children with the opportunity to use language power while attending to the written page. In order for children to transfer linguistic competence to reading, they must have sufficient opportunity to read material that is interesting and worth the effort.

The implicit linguistic competence children bring to the written page consists of:

1) Phonological information concerning articulatory and acoustic patterns which enables them to produce and comprehend speech, i.e., to encode and decode the phonemic sequencing and sound shapes of words.
2) Syntactic knowledge of the structure, word order, word categories, and patterns of sentences.
3) Semantic information based on experience and the vocabulary tags they have learned for lexical information.

They find on the written page three kinds of linguistic stimuli:

1) Graphic information concerning the letters used in printing and their sequencing in words.
2) Syntactic structure consisting of word order, word categories, and patterns of sentences.
3) Semantic cues providing the lexical information or bundles of experience which have been given vocabulary tags by an author.

To use the syntactic and semantic information available they must transform the graphic stimuli into a reasonable approximation of the sound shapes represented. In order to recognize the words of the written page children apply linguistic knowledge of sounds associated with words, word order in sentences, and general sentence structure to derive the semantic meaning of the sentences and paragraphs they encounter. Since words acquire a richness of sense from the context in which they appear; assisted reading, by supplying the graphic shapes a child does not know or immediately recognize, allows children to utilize the conceptual knowledge of their world, the language power they have developed in the process of acquiring the language of the speech community, and the sense words acquire in the full context of discourse. Instead of bits and pieces of words, phrases, and sentences, a child is provided with opportunities to read within the full context of language. Since children are not denied the full context of spoken language while learning to speak, they should not be denied the full context of written language while learning to read.

If children are provided with the full rich context of language while learning to read, they have more opportunity to abstract the regularities of the orthography and to generalize many of the phoneme-grapheme correspondences that they must now piece together from the bits and pieces of language provided in most beginning reading programs. It is possible that children's generalizing power can be utilized without bogging them down with the minutiae of instruction and work sheets that may have no relevance for the reading process in which they are engaged. Since there is a system within the language and children have a set for processing the diversity of language and a set for pattern search, providing complete context for reading should enable children to discover the orthographic regularities of the written language in a similar manner to the way in which they discovered the systematic nature of the spoken language. Children may

need help on some aspects of the written language that are not systematic or which they do not discover themselves just as they need this kind of help in learning the meanings of some words. However, it should not be taken for granted that the child is naturally deficient and must therefore receive direct formal instruction in every aspect of reading as is often indicated in a reading series. Too little is known about the reading process itself to insist that every child move through a systematic program of reading instruction and cover all the exercises that have been devised to "teach" reading. *Possibly*, for children to use their full language power they must be allowed to read more than the few minutes they are allotted in a reading group.

Assisted reading is based on the premise that initially a child needs to see the graphic shapes of words, hear them pronounced, and follow their patterning in sentences that contain enough syntactic and semantic context to permit relating experience and conceptual knowledge to the material being read. The problem of immersing a child in reading and assisting without resorting to more formal methods is one of finding ways to provide the technical means, the materials, and the organization within the classroom and the family to furnish a child with the opportunity to read and thus develop his or her reading capacity more fully. Within the classroom, the teacher can supplement the reading program with a tape recorder and listening post by means of which the child follows the graphic shapes of a story while listening to a recording of the same story. A child, when reading with another child or parent, can also be assisted with words the moment they are needed.

Classroom Application of Assisted Reading

The assisted reading program of the second grade class described here incorporated the use of a tape recorder, a listening post, and reading couples. A listening-reading station was set up with a cassette tape recorder, a record player, six supplementary reading books containing the taped read-along stories, and a listening post with six headphones. Each day the teacher taped stories for the students on or just above their reading level as determined by the basal text in which the pupils were reading. The taped stories were prepared from supplemental reading texts stored in the bookroom. The five commercial records were those available in the school.

The teacher had the best results with listening and reading when reading of the selection was paced to suit the fluency level of the pupils, for the slow readers lost their places and daydreamed if their stories were read too quickly. The fast readers became restless and inattentive if the reading pace was too slow. The pupils established a smoother more fluent pace for reading a story while being assisted by the taped reading of the teacher. By this means the pupils were exposed to both fluent reading and vocabulary in the total context of language, i.e., the syntactic, phonological, and semantic information was supplied in total rather than in isolated bits and pieces. McNeil (1970) reports that in learning to speak, the comprehension rate for young children is best at their own rate of speech. The same was true for the pacing of the taped stories. The pupils read best when the tapes were paced at rates that approximated their individual fluency rates.

At the listening-reading station, students were instructed to listen to the recordings and follow the words in their books. There was time allotted on the recordings for looking at pictures and turning pages. By following this procedure the pupils were involved in both hearing and pronouncing the words aloud or to themselves, thus producing a smoother reading of the story.

The result was that pupils enjoyed reading literature without the frustration of stumbling through words they did not know by themselves. This led to a very relaxed, non-threatening atmosphere in respect to reading. Tension was increased and fun and interest diminished when comprehension questions were added. Assisted reading should be fun and remain free of any attempts to teach skills. Pupils need practice in reading! There are many other opportunities during the day to check comprehension and other "skills."

Reading couples were incorporated into the assisted reading program once a week. Pupils were paired on the same level and across reading levels to read stories they had previously been assisted to read, the listener providing his or her partner with any words not remembered. Pupils enjoyed the opportunity to share stories with their classmates, slower readers finding confidence in this activity, faster readers enjoying extended opportunities to read, both groups eager to engage in the reading couples activity.

Findings

Observations by the teacher indicated the program was very beneficial to students when used in conjunction with classroom reading instruction. The findings include:

1) The slow readers became more confident in their reading ability. Some of the students would read the stories aloud while listening. Others would call out words that were familiar or that they were studying in class. They seemed more eager to read to others when they were familiar with the material. These students also were more eager to respond when in their reading groups.

2) The slow readers began attacking new words more often with more success. Not only were they taught reading skills, but now they saw them at work. The students seemed to realize that there was a reason for learning the rules because they saw how they were actually used.

3) The students seemed to be more aware of the vocabulary being taught because they saw it used within a story. The important thing here is that the students did not see these same points before. Because they were struggling so hard not to make a mistake, they missed many fine points. Now they could relax and, thereby, become aware of these factors, i.e., the meaning of words in context or generalizations made in rules.

4) The students on a whole became more aware of their reading level, or at least more confident that they could read at a certain level. They were able to select books better that they could read by themselves. Before the program, the students selected books that were either too hard or way to easy for them.

5) The students were exposed to more of a variety of literature they could read, and which was available to them. This seemed to lead to a broader interest in books. Before this program was started, the students selected the same small number of books from the library. Usually these books were books they had already taken out in first grade or books that were read to them. Through the assisted reading program, they became aware that other books were also enjoyable. For example, after they had read *Petunia* the students cleared out the library of all books about *Petunia*. Prior to this it was questionable that they realized that such a book was available, let alone enjoyable to read.

6) The students also seemed to improve in their listening skills. At first the readings had to be short in order to keep the children's attention. Towards the end of the year, the length of the readings was increased without apparent loss of interest.

7) The speed of the readings was also increased towards the end without apparent upset to the students.

Further Suggestions:

1) The tapes used in this program were much too long (60 minutes) making it necessary to put more than one story on each side of the tape. Since it is very difficult for primary pupils to rewind a tape to the beginning of a story when the story is in the middle of a tape, tapes should be of a shorter recording time (10 or 15 minutes per side). Each side could thus present only one story and the story would begin at the beginning of the tape. The pupils would then be able to find the stories them-

selves making it possible to listen to the stories they wanted to read as many times as they wished and at any time during the day.

2) Basal readers were mostly used in the above program. If multiple copies of trade books with a single story were available, more variety of literature could be used. The pupils seem to gain more satisfaction from reading a story from cover to cover than reading a story within a book of stories.

3) Teachers that are obligated to correlate the reading program with the instructional program could do this by selecting readings that expand upon a unit being taught and use the same vocabulary that is being taught. Caution: Assisted reading should be fun. Select stories children enjoy.

Further Applications of Assisted Reading

Although the findings reported concern only one classroom, other indications of the potential for assisted reading are being investigated by the major author and other graduate students. Some of these indications are being gleaned from case studies involving parents and graduate students who were using assisted reading with preschool and kindergarten children. The strategies used in assisted reading and alphabetic play (see EE, Nov/Dec, 1974) are also being combined for use with beginning readers in other case studies. Preliminary information suggests assisted reading and alphabetic play as effective means for helping children learn to read in much the same manner that they learned to speak, i.e., being immersed in written language as they were immersed in spoken language.

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(continued from page 23)

is displayed in varied contexts so that the child can note the regularity for himself. Mothers do not correct their children's language, they simply provide an expanded sample on a series of occasions and over time the child extracts the critical concept and applies it.

Summary

We have discussed how knowledge about oral language acquisition may help guide us in teaching children to read. Central to our discussion is that the child possesses characteristics which serve him in learning oral language as well as learning to read. The child learns global generalities first which are later differentiated. However, he must have opportunities to explore fully the subwholes of written language just as he has done in learning to talk. He needs to be able to discover when what he has learned is correct. He needs to have provided for him larger samples of written language when his responses are incorrect so he can reformulate his generalizations. If the principles stated here can be applied, instruction in the teaching of reading should more closely approximate the natural way children learn and reading instruction should meet with greater success than it has in the past.

Whose Dialect for Beginning Readers?

Yetta M. Goodman
Rudine Sims

> Looks like we always end up in a rut
> Trying to make it real, but compared to what?[1]

Concern about the relatively poor performance of so-called inner city children on standardized reading and achievement tests has sent educators and researchers digging for answers and solutions. We have dug into the children's homes and families, their neighborhoods, their learning styles, their language patterns. Lately, an array of educators, psychologists, and linguists have focused on the language these youngsters bring to school and the possible effect it might have on the teaching of reading and the other language arts.

We find that a systematic, structured dialect of English is spoken by some Blacks in large American cities and we can describe the features of that dialect. We reject the idea that possession of that dialect as one's native tongue constitutes a linguistic and/or a cognitive deficiency. But still we have only partial answers and inadequate solutions to our questions regarding these youngsters and the teaching of reading. It may be that we are about to "end up in a rut," because our present digging is being guided by questions that are too narrow, and underlying assumptions that are, at best, unenlightened. We're "trying to make it real, but compared to what?"

We contend that, in light of our own research and that of others, the time has come to expand the questions about nonstandard Black dialect and reading, and perhaps in so doing, to recast the issues in a larger mold.

The significant difference between language being produced by the speaker compared to its being received by the listener is one important issue. Production of language and reception of language do not operate in the same way. In child language acquisition, reception precedes production. Children understand many aspects of language before they are able to produce language themselves. In learning a foreign language, one has greater facility in understanding or receiving the language than producing it.

All of us are able to understand many different dialects of American English in addition to our own, although we are unable to produce most of them. When we travel from one geographic region to another, we may have to adjust or tune in to the new and different features of a previously unfamiliar dialect, but before very long we are able to receive the dialect of the people around us. Some research

1. Lyrics from song "Compared to What" by Gene McDaniels.

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studies suggest that inner city youngsters may be able to receive a broader range of dialect differences than more affluent youngsters. (Cox, 1971). This may be due to the broader experiences which inner city youngsters have with the language on television, the language of teachers and principals, and the language of storekeepers, policemen and other workers in the community. Generally, middle class children are deprived of such a broad range of dialects and are familiar only with their own.

It is significant to restate that there are greater similarities across English dialect boundaries than there are differences. In addition, certain standard regional dialects share some features of Black English vernacular, such as the homophonous *pin* and *pen* and the absence of "r" in certain linguistic environments (e.g. *pak the cah* or *No'th Ca'lina*). With a minimum of effort for most American speakers of English, a brief exposure to a new dialect is all that is needed before communication can take place. Additional research evidence indicates that speakers of nonstandard urban Black dialect have an ability to deal with standard English as a receptive process.

With the aid of William Steward, Quay (1971) translated the Stanford Binet test into Black dialect and tested its effect on four year old "disadvantaged" Black children, compared to the standard version. She found no difference in scores on the standard version and the dialect version. She interprets her results as indicating that the children tested had more ability to comprehend standard English than was thought.

In the Baratz (1909) sentence repetition test, speakers of both standard English and Black dialect "translated" syntactic features of sentences heard in the less familiar dialect into syntactic features of their own dialect. For instance, a sentence like *He asked me if I wanted to go . . .* would be repeated *He asked me did I want to go.* and vice versa.

In the Reading Miscue Research Projects conducted at Wayne State University, Goodman and his associates found that Black dialect speakers frequently read standard English structures orally as Black dialect structures. This was particularly true with verb forms, such as those involving the third person singular "s" form or the past tense "ed" marker. Such forms were frequently read as unmarked, e.g. *Leroy pointed to Ollie* was read *Leroy point to Ollie.*

In both the Baratz and the Goodman studies, changes made by the subjects were surface changes, that is they retained the meanings of the original sentences. It must be assumed that, in order for speakers to translate orally from one dialect to another, they must comprehend, i.e. have receptive control of the first dialect.

Reading is a receptive process. Research in reading has been conducted as if it were a productive process. Researchers and teachers assume that when a student reads a word or phrase in a way not exactly as the adult thought it should be read that it was not understood. Yet, the miscue reading studies suggest that when readers read orally in their own dialect, they more than likely understood the message and then transformed the meaning into the oral production of their own dialect.

The questions which we now raise include:

1. Is receptive control of standard English a minimum requirement for learning to read American English?
2. How can we help teachers understand the significant differences between receptive and productive language processes?
3. How can we diagnose children's reading in order to focus on what they have received or understood and not place pre-

miums on production in reading?

A second issue is that of confusing the teaching of reading with changing the oral language of the reader. Often when students are corrected when reading orally, they are not aware of why they are being corrected. If students say what sounds like *hep* when they read *helped* and are corrected, they may think that they have not recognized the word or they may become confused over the rule about "ed" and end up reading *helpted* for a period of time. Actually if they read *hep* fluently and are able to explain what someone was doing in the story, they comprehended and actually read correctly in their dialect. When meaning is received, it must be integrated with the linguistic and conceptual system that the reader knows. Oral reading may be used by the teacher to diagnose a child's reading, but it must be recognized that oral reading is productive and not by itself an indicator of the meaning a student has received. When students are taught to read in the teacher's dialect, they may have satisfied the teacher's requirement, but may have destroyed for themselves the idea that the goal of reading is meaning. If the teacher and the reader concentrate on an oral production in reading which is *not* in the reader's mother tongue, meaning for the most part becomes the fatal victim.

Questions which need to be examined in relationship to this issue include:

1. If attempts are made to teach a standard dialect of English to speakers of a nonstandard dialect during the teaching of reading, does the major focus in the teaching become oral production?

2. Does a focus on oral reading minimize the focus on reading as a meaning gaining activity?

A third issue concerns beginning reading materials. The question has been whether or not there is a need for dialect-specific materials. We submit that the larger question is: Whose dialect, or which dialect(s) for beginning readers?

Assuming that the beginning reader's task will be easier if the language read reflects the language spoken, one possibility is to create materials written in nonstandard Black dialect for Black dialect speakers. These materials would incorporate the syntactic features of the dialect as described by linguists. The assumption is that materials written in the dialect would provide greater ease of predictability for the reader. That is, if readers understand that what they are reading is supposed to "sound" like language, beginners find reading easier if the written language "sounds" like their own. They can make fairly accurate predictions about what language structures they are likely to find on the printed page. This assumption is true *if* the dialect materials accurately reflect their dialect. And that refers back to our question: *Whose* dialect for beginning readers?

When trying to develop commercially useful dialect specific materials for wide scale use, one is likely to find some problems that render the materials no more suitable for some beginning readers who are speakers of Black dialect than materials written in standard English.

Among the speakers in a given Black community, and across communities nationally, variation may exist in the spoken dialects. Additionally, there is variability within one speaker, depending on a number of extra-linguistic factors. The same speaker may use different dialect features in different situations. This is not to negate the existence of a dialect which can be called Black dialect, the features of which can be identified and described linguistically. It is to say that, because of various factors, such as the recognition of the low-status of the dialect, any one feature may or may not be used by any one speaker in a given situation. New arrivals who have

come to large northern Black ghettos from the rural South are frequently identified as "country" by their urban cousins because of their speech differences.

It is not difficult to create materials which accurately reflect common features of Black dialect. However, in so doing one can have the effect of standardizing the dialect, thereby reflecting accurately the language of some, but missing others.

A second problem with dialect specific materials concerns their content. Beginning readers must come to understand that what they are reading must not only "sound" like language, but it must also make sense. In an attempt to make materials relevant, authors write about their visions of the Black dialect speaker's common experiences. However, one child kicks a soda can and calls his grandmother, who lives in the same house with him, Big Mamma. Another child buys, pop, not soda, and *his* grandmother, whom he calls Grandma Nettie, lives "down South." Which experience is "typical"?

An alternative to commercially prepared dialect-specific materials is the language-experience approach. This approach uses each child's language and personal experiences in beginning reading instruction. Recording children's language helps them to see the relationship between written language and the language they know. Encouraging them to do their own writing as early as possible, and allowing them to experiment with orthography without penalty as they are learning will further strengthen knowledge.

When children read about their own experiences, they obviously have no difficulty comprehending what they read. For beginners, that characteristic of the language-experience approach makes the task of learning to read easier.

The use of such an approach assumes that the teacher has knowledge of and respect for the language the children speak, as well as knowledge about the reading process and child language development. To the extent that a teacher lacks this knowledge and respect, he or she can be ineffective in teaching reading no matter what method or material is used.

Once children learn, through a language experience approach, that what they read is supposed to "sound" like language and to make sense, they can begin to deal with written language other than their own, i.e. standard written English. Teachers who read to children help them to "tune in" to what written English "sounds" like. If the material is meaningful, and the language natural, it is only a few short steps from understanding it orally to reading it.

Written language is *not* "talk written down." Written language differs from oral language, even though it may be closer to some standard dialects than to non-standard ones. All readers must learn to deal with a written system which differs in some ways from their oral language. Written language has differences in styles and forms which might even be compared to dialect differences. All children learning to read must learn to deal with the differences between oral and written languages in the same way they learn to receive different dialects.

We leave this third issue with two questions:

1. How can linguists and educators help teachers become more effective teachers of reading by increasing their knowledge about language acquisition, the language of the children they teach, and the reading process?

2. What linguistic characteristics of written materials make them easier or more difficult for beginning readers?

Generally, reading miscue research has shown that when students read in their own dialect they are comprehending what

they are reading. At the same time we know that children who have a dialect different from the one the teacher speaks is more likely to have trouble in reading than the youngster who speaks like the teacher. It is possible that in trying to solve the problem, we have looked at readers and their language as the problem rather than to examine the complex psycho-socio-cultural aspects in the society which may shed light on the issues.

The attitude that people have toward dialect is of great importance. The way in which a teacher accepts or rejects a student's language may enhance or destroy a positive self-concept, which has strong bearing on learning to read. The attitude that Black English vernacular is low status permeates the educational establishment, and even speakers of that dialect often support the school in their attempts to eradicate low status dialects.

However, in this period of Black awareness there is a growing force of young people who have begun to reject the middle class values of the dominant economic classes and may in turn reject the dialects of the dominant classes because they view them as the language of the establishment, the language of the assimilationists, and the language of the oppressors.

This awareness is ultimately related to whether the student has the need to expand language and communicate with speakers of dialects different from his or her own. As students reject aspects of a dominant culture, reading in itself may become a target for some young people and it may become "cool" not to become too good at reading.

Teachers who are good listeners are aware that many students have the ability to switch dialects depending on time and place. We need to know much more about the proficiency of dialect switching, which may give us insights into which students participate in this activity and when and how it is done.

Ethnocentric researchers build into their tests and techniques language devices which prove that the students are speakers of a low status dialect rather than provide information about the proficiency of a student's reading. Standardized tests especially cannot deal with the experiences, knowledge and language which economically poor students might understand or relate to. The degree of comfort a student feels in a situation where reading assessment takes place also indicates that other factors besides reading proficiency may be involved.

Little has been done to study what students must read in order to survive in their worlds. To what extent do students who have low scores in reading pass written tests for driver's licenses? Examining the cultural environment of students and discovering how people in that environment survive in relationship to literate activities might present a more realistic picture of the extent of reading problems than we have had before.

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Personalizing Reading Instruction

Maureen Cathcart

An effective and exciting reading program with activities designed to meet the needs of each learner, which produces children who not only can but do read, is an ideal to be strived for by teachers of reading.

Setting forth to implement such a program without a map and guideposts would lead to confusion for the students and disillusionment for the teacher. Awareness of the philosophies and research findings which support the current trends in reading instruction is essential. Knowing what has thus far been discovered about the way children learn to read and understanding the goals of reading instruction at each level of development, the teacher can more wisely decide on the reading program best suited to the learning styles of her students.

No matter which approach to reading instruction is to be employed, much detailed planning is necessary before the program is initiated. Parental and supervisory support can have significant effect upon the success of a reading program. What are the attitudes of your administrators and the community toward various methods of reading instruction? What attitudes toward reading do the children have? What work habits will the students need to develop in order to progress in the program in the most efficient way? What materials are available? What materials will the teacher have to prepare? What procedures will be employed to make instruction, evaluation, and record keeping efficient? These and many other questions must be considered at the outset.

The three approaches to reading instruction most widely used are the language experience method, the basal reader method, and individualized reading. Each alone has certain strengths and weaknesses.

The language experience approach is used most frequently at the primary level for the initial teaching of reading. Experience charts composed by individuals, groups, or the class and recorded by the teacher serve as reading material. The children use the words contained in their aural and oral vocabularies to write something which can be read. Children generally show much interest in what they themselves have written and they are better able to read this kind of material because the words are familiar to them. This method aims to help children arrive at the following conclusions:

> What I can think about, I can talk about.
> What I can say, I can write.
> What I can write, I can read.
> I can read what I write, and what other people can write for me to read.[1]

This approach is also used in remedial pro-

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1. R. Van Allen, "Three Approaches to Teaching Reading," *Challenge and Experiment in Reading*, International Reading Association Conference Proceedings, Volume 7, 1962, p. 154.

grams for older children. It is a personalized approach because it uses the child's own language in creating materials for him to read and requires interaction between teacher and learner in preparing these materials. However, as the child advances in reading skills his need for materials which deal with information and ideas beyond his own exeriences grows. It is then that the language experience approach is no longer adequate as the major approach to reading instruction. The principles underlying this approach to reading instruction can, however, be useful at all levels since children love to read what they and other children have written.

The basal reader approach is the most widely used and depersonalized approach to reading. If three groups of approximately ten children work simultaneously at workbook activities, silent reading, and teacher directed oral reading, each group, as they rotate activities, would receive twenty-five to thirty minutes of teacher directed oral reading each day or about 2½ to 3 minutes a day per child. When you take into consideration the time spent in checking independent activities, moving into and out of reading circles, the introduction of new vocabulary, motivation, silent reading, discussion, and maybe a few interruptions, the time each child spends in reading for the teacher is cut considerably. How much interaction can take place between teacher and learner when the child must share her with so many others? How closely can the teacher focus on the needs of a particular learner when she must "teach" the group? How interesting is it for a child in the group to listen to classmates' ommissions, substitutions, poor phrasing, misunderstandings, and poor expression? Would not time be better spent in working with a child individually for about five minutes every two days, bringing him into small, flexible, temporary groups only when needed to develop a particular skill or erase a particular problem shared by the members of the group, instead of giving the same medicine to every member of the typical basal reading group whether or not it is needed? Instead of having the child listen to all the others in his group no matter how poorly some might express themselves, might not time be better spent in hearing the teacher read aloud as a model of expression to be imitated? If we accept the theory that language patterns develop through listening, speaking, reading, and writing (in that order), let them hear the best speaker, the teacher, and hear the best in children's literature. Fortunately, many publishers are no longer being controlled by controlled vocabulary. Newer basals sparkle with fine prose and poetry which make reading interesting and enjoyable, the way it should be. The basal reader approach cannot be equalled for systematic development of reading skills; however, since stigmatized grouping practices could generate emotional problems, especially for the slow learner, and since working in the group can become dull and routinized no matter how creative the teacher is, the basal reader may not be the best approach for all children.

The third approach to reading, and perhaps the most widely discussed and written about today, is individualized reading. According to Priscilla Lynch, individualized reading is not a method of teaching reading but a plan of organization in which many methods of teaching reading may be used. Underlying the methods used are the beliefs that:

1. Self-selection of books is highly motivating.
2. Children will read more widely and with greater enthusiasm when they are self-motivated.
3. Active involvement will aid in the development of responsibility for one's own learning.

4. Active involvement causes more effective and efficient learning.

5. Each child is unique with learning needs and styles of learning all his own.

6. An individualized program permits the teacher to get to know each child, his strengths and weaknesses.

7. Knowledge of pupil needs will enable the teacher to design learning experiences that will capitalize on the strengths and aid in eliminating the weaknesses.

8. An atmosphere of encouragement, guidance, and understanding coupled with appropriate and necessary materials is the optimum learning situation.

If teachers abandon the Procrustean notion of fitting the child to the program and aim to develop the appropriate program for each child the strong points of all three programs may be employed, resulting in an eclectic reading program. Witty wrote,

> It seems that a defensible program in reading will combine the best features of both individual and group instruction in reading. . . . A defensible reading program . . . recognizes the value of systematic instruction, utilization of interests, fulfillment of developmental needs, and the articulation of reading experience with other types of worthwhile activities.[2]

Strang also questions whether it is necessary to choose between a basal aproach and an individualized approach.[3]

Starting Your Own Personalized Reading Program

Books! Books! Books!

First, we need books, all kinds of books to attract children with varied interests, abilities, curiosities, and backgrounds. Having a wide selection right there in your own classroom is the ideal situation. But how is such a collection amassed? There are many ways.

Many schools purchase multiple copies of certain trade books for classroom libraries. The public school libraries, if large enough, may permit you to withdraw a large number of books for classroom use. If not, the children should be encouraged and assisted to do their own selecting while they are in the school library. Discuss with the children how to choose a book that will suit the reader's interests and abilities so that they will choose wisely when they are on their own in a public library. A field trip to the local public library can provide many valuable learning experiences and help cement a desirable relationship between your young readers and this source of books.

Many publishers are now marketing individualized reading kits consisting of books (mostly paperbacks) and other materials needed to carry on an individualized program, such as, project cards, forms for record keeping, summaries of books contained in the kit and discussion questions, suggestions for sharing activities, etc.

Membership in a paperback book club is another way to build a classroom library. The low cost of paperbacks puts ownership of books within the reach of everyone. Children can buy books, with their classmates they can swap the ones they have read, and occasionally, they may wish to contribute some of their books to the classroom library. Most clubs offer free books as dividends. With many paperbacks within the 35¢ to 60¢ range, think of the number and variety of books which can be acquired from an investment of $35 to $50.

School-wide book fairs and book swaps are other ways of getting books into the children's hands and into the classroom.

2. Paul Witty, "Individualized Reading–A Summary and Evaluation," *Elementary English*, 36 (October, 1959), p. 450.

3. Ruth Strang, "Controversial Programs and Procedures in Reading," *The School Review*, 69 (Winter, 1961), pp. 420-21.

Assemble the books in an attractive and organized arrangement in an area of the room where children can easily go to make their selections. Bulletin boards, book displays, mobiles, posters, and the children's own book sharing devices (a card file of reactions to books that have been read, dioramas, art work, things which have been constructed or collected, etc.) may also be used to enhance the reading area.

The Atmosphere

Set up "quiet areas" where children can sit on chairs or recline on mats while they enjoy their books without being disturbed. Some schools in the Mid-West have experimented with a procedure known as U.S.S.R. (Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading), a period of approximately twenty minutes daily when everyone in the building (students, teachers, supervisors, even the custodians!) does nothing but read either for information, enjoyment, or both.

Other areas in the room should be set up for conferences, for book sharing, and for language and art activities related to book sharing. It is a good idea to have paper, scissors, glue, a variety of scrap objects, and art materials readily available to the children so that they will not have to disturb you while you are having a conference with a child about his reading.

Ground rules for behavior during reading activities and for the use of the areas should be arrived at by the teacher and children cooperatively. When the children understand what is expected of them and have had a voice in setting up procedures that will help them work in a more enjoyable atmosphere, they are more likely to adhere to the rules.

Introducing Your Program

Getting acquainted with the unique interests and needs of each learner and acquainting the learner with the program will take much time, but it will be time well spent.

First, you must determine what reading ability the child already has. Some commercially prepared individualized reading kits provide diagnostic material. Many basal reading programs do, also. You can use your own informal inventories or use those found in Nila Banton Smith's book *Graded Selections for Informal Reading Diagnosis* to get an idea of each child's general ability. Standardized test scores are also helpful but should never be the sole basis for judging a reader's ability. In your initial conferences it is also suggested that you ask each child what he considers his problems to be and what his reading interests are. This is an important step in setting up your program since you want to be sure that there are enough books on hand for children whose abilities and interests may cover a wide range. Next give the child a choice of several books which are on his reading level and which correspond to his interests.

The child will proceed with greater confidence and success if he is aware of what is expected of him. Explain what your program consists of and why he will be doing each of the activities. Develop with him the idea that he must become actively involved in his own learning. Demonstrate what a conference is and explain why there will be conferences regularly. Show him how to keep a record of his reading.

The Child's Role

The child will select books which he wants to read and which are on his level. How does the child know if a book is too hard for him? Teach him the Rule of Thumb. He opens a book to any page and tries to read it. Each time he encounters a word he cannot understand he counts off a

finger on his hand. If he counts off all five fingers on his hand while reading that page, the book is too hard for him. Most children can do this on their own. If some are less independent, a more skilled reader might serve as a listener and help others select their books.

Frequently, at least once or twice a week, each child will have a conference with the teacher concerning what he has read. When he finishes a book he will engage in an activity related directly or indirectly to the book he has read. It may take the form of a written activity, puppetry, dramatization, a group discussion, a display, or some other creative project. If a child has read more than one book lately he may choose to do a project on the book of his choice. The project helps you determine whether or not the child comprehended what he was reading, develops his ability to work independently, and the sharing of the project with his classmates helps develop interest in books.

The child will keep a record of the books he has read. The title, author, number of pages, new or interesting words encountered, and a brief opinion of the book are the types of information you might want the child to record. Many teachers also use a reading wheel as part of the student's records. It tells him and his teacher whether his reading is confined to one type of book or encompasses various types.

The Conference

In the beginning, the teacher may assign a particular order for conferences. Later on, she may have the children sign up for conferences as needed.

During the five minutes of the conference, the child will read a selection from his book which he has chosen and practiced. The teacher may also have him read a page which he reads silently first, then aloud. Questions about the book in general or about the parts he reads aloud are asked. The child may also recount events which took place in the story or, if the book is a nonfiction book, he may tell what new ideas or understandings he has gained. The conference is a time when literary appreciations may also be developed with the child.

Teacher's Records

During the conference the teacher should recognize the difficulties which the reader may be encountering. Making note of these will be of value for future conferences and for independent or small group work. The teacher should also note what the reader does well. The teacher's records may take the form of a check list or it may be anecdotal. Study of several check lists for evaluating reading found in books on reading, curriculum guides, and teacher's editions of basal readers is suggested so that if you do use the anecdotal method you will be more aware of what habits to observe and make note of.

Skill Development

Some criticize individualized reading because its method of skill development tends to be less systematized than that of the basal reader approach. The basal reader does fit into a personalized reading program. Instead of having all children work in inflexible groupings, working from the same basal text, why not through tapes, worksheets, and pupil pairing make advancement through a basal text a more independent, self-paced activity? Teams of children who learn at approximately the same pace can be given the opportunity of hearing the new vocabulary on tape while seeing the words on their worksheets. Worksheets might also include prereading

questions as motivation, questions requiring a variety of skills or one specific skill for their completion, discussion questions, and a choice of activities to be done after the silent reading.

Grouping

When a number of children demonstrate a weakness in a particular skill, small temporary groups can be formed.

Book Sharing

Time and space should be set aside for children to share their reading experiences with one another. The child should not be doing his reading just for the teacher. In book sharing, he may be showing the project which resulted from his reading or he may be reading a selection from the book which he has found particularly interesting or exciting.

Literary Appreciations

Literary appreciations can be developed in the conferences, during sharing periods, and through reading aloud to the class. In reading aloud, the teacher not only serves as a model of good expression but also gives something back to the children for the literary experiences they have shared with her in their conferences. It gives the group an experience in common and it is amazing how many of the skills that you have worked to develop suddenly fall into place when a class is responding to a book they all enjoy.

A Total Language Experience

Providing enough time for conferences is always a problem. Curriculum demands, coverages by specialists, assemblies, cut into the time a teacher can spend holding conferences. By planning carefully and planning big blocks of time much can be accomplished. While conferences are being held children may be reading, working on spelling words, practicing their handwriting, doing creative writing, doing research for science or social studies or any number of other activities. If we are to use a personalized approach to reading it cannot stop there. There are times when a child feels more like reading than at other times during the day. That is when he should read. Likewise, there are times when a child is more motivated to write a poem or story, or to master his spelling words. Self-motivation usually produces a higher quality of work and the child can utilize his time more wisely when he is not forced to keep up with or wait for others in a large group. Planning in large blocks of time with many alternative activities provides a total language experience for the child, develops his independence, and can increase his output.

In Conclusion

Every child is a unique individual. No one program or approach to reading could be exactly right for every child. We, as teachers, must be cognizant of the approaches and programs available and create a program suitable to the needs of our students.

As teachers, we must reveal to children the treasures to be found in books so that each child will want to communicate with authors through reading, seeing reading as a weapon for survival in the world of school, in the world of business, and for the survival of his own happiness.

Read Much, But Not Too Many Books

Pat N. Nash

On initial perusal, the title of this article implies a dichotomy to laymen and some professional educators. How is it possible to read without reading books? Is the inference perhaps that current informative publications, such as newspapers and periodicals, are of most value? Or could it be that the statement cautions one against becoming a "bookworm" type, shunning an encounter with the real world? Does it imply that all knowledge is not to be found in books? There is, indeed, a subtle meaning in the statement and one most pertinent to instructional programs in today's elementary schools. The following discussion should provide the reader with the tacit meaning of this quotation and in turn be a stimulus for inquiry into some of the rationale concerned with the place of reading in instructional programs in our elementary schools today.

Whenever one thinks of school or education, no matter whether it be pre-school programs or graduate, the dominant thinking usually centers around one area: reading and all the books and materials related thereto. Most educational programs start with the premise that reading is the ultimate learning and that the necessary learnings for survival can best be learned through the medium of reading. Pre-school programs abound with activities designed to develop reading readiness with many programs emphasizing phonics as the reason for the existence of such pre-school programs. Such attitudes toward reading and learning are not unique to pre-school programs, however, at every educational level a reading bias is prevalent. Upper elementary grade levels are replete with an almost unbelievable amount of material to be read. As a student matriculates at succeeding levels, the reading material avalanches. Reading has become an end in itself, a prerequisite for all learning. It is time we questioned some of the entrenched dogma concerning reading which is presently espoused by both laymen and professional educators, and which, in fact, hinders real learning.

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Reading and Society

The primary question concerns the necessity of individuals' having to read because we live in a reading society. How can a member of our society exist without reading? Zealots of the reading fraternity immediately expound upon the complete chaos which would result from failure to read the necessary messages in our day-to-day experiences. There is no argument here. Anthropologists, sociologists, and other authorities give moot evidence that accepted members of a society must be able to "read" to the extent that the expressed

values of that society are assimilated. This is a far cry from the idea that we live in a society that reads in order to increase its knowledge of the world and that if a person is not an astute reader, he will not be a highly contributing member of his society.

The assumption is that we do live in a reading society. Do we really? There is some disturbing evidence which indicates that such thinking is erroneous, that we are moving in an almost irreversible direction of reading less and less. Newspaper publishers, for example, are concerned that their percentage of readers has decreased over the past few years, even though the actual number of readers has increased. Another bit of evidence, a rather shocking one, is a study made by the Carnegie Foundation which showed that fifty per cent of the people who received baccalaureate degrees never read another book! Such evidence does not support the thesis that we live in a reading society.

Emphasis on Teaching Reading

The expected argument in opposition to the above presentation is that if we are becoming a non-reading society it is a result of a lack of emphasis on reading in the elementary school. Phonics training is being ignored and the look-say method is breeding a generation of non-readers. The professionals, taking a more rational approach, emphasize new diagnostic techniques, programmed reading materials, gimmicks, and define more terms with which to label children with "reading problems." (Of the two groups mentioned above, the professionals are to be criticized more severely—they should know better.)

The educational market today is inundated with "new" or "modern" programs for teaching reading, most of which reinforce the same time-worn concept of reading with little, if any, consideration given to the relationship of reading to the total learning process. Classroom teachers are kept constantly in a state of confusion by this influx of "modern" reading programs. On one hand, teachers get the idea they must not be doing a competent job of teaching reading and that they should try a new program. On the other hand, they interpret the introduction of new reading programs as more emphasis on reading, which causes pressure on the teacher which is projected to the children. *It is because of this over-emphasis on reading that we are becoming a non-reading society.*

Reading has become more important than learning. By the very method we use to teach reading we not only discourage children to read: we also discourage learning because the child is reinforced again and again in the early reading program that reading is learning. The student comes to see reading as both means and end to all learning rather than just a means. The ensuing school program is developed apparently from the tenacious belief that the best learning is that which is concerned with reading. It takes little intellectual investigation to determine that those children who do not learn to read in the beginning stages have nothing but failure and frustration ahead of them in their future years in school. Their failure to read dooms them to stigmatization, not only in their school years but, in many cases, for the remainder of their lives. The child entering school in first grade is expected to learn to read within an allotted time, usually within the first few months of school.

This reading doctrine is so well entrenched that it becomes difficult even to discuss certain considerations which deviate from the established thinking. It is as though reading has become an absolute that is not to be questioned, that a child must learn to read in first grade or he will not "make it" in this society. To ask the ques-

tion, "How do you know that children *should* learn to read at age six?" elicits cold stares followed by statements dealing with a child's "need" to read, reading as a "tool" for all learning, and "are you a communist or something?" There is little, if any, evidence to support the thesis that children should learn to read at age six. *We have designed our instruction and curricula in such a manner that reading is mandatory*; and as a result, the seemingly logical assumption is made that learning to read is a natural prerequisite for learning.

How foolish can we be? It is as though we see the first six years of a child's life (in which he or she learns perhaps the most complex of all learnings—speech and social behavior) as a vacuum in which he or she has not learned anything of real importance. We tend to ignore the richness of learning that has taken place. Therefore, when children start to school in first grade, learning as the child sees it ceases to exist for we present learning in a manner unrecognizable to the child. Learning must stop in order that we may teach the child to read! Many knowledgeable educators will not allow themselves to contemplate the consequences of such instructional procedures—it is too terrifying.

Paradoxically, the research dealing with reading does indicate strongly that all children cannot learn to read at age six, that there is a wide range of readiness which might extend from age four through age eight. In addition, we know that the factors related to inability to read are most complex and largely an individual proposition. Yet, it seems that this evidence is completely ignored in most instances. In a majority of cases children, without regard for known differences that exist, are introduced to sterile, mechanistic reading programs in which it can be predicted in advance that a relatively large percentage of them will fail.

So, it appears that on one hand we have access to evidence that should help us design applicable reading programs, and on the other hand we have no evidence that children *should* learn to read at age six. In a most contradictory manner, we are behaving counter to the evidence available. We are supporting reading programs which ignore differences within individuals that we know exist and therefore doom some children to failure; however, we blindly hang on to the tenet that all children should learn to read at age six with no supporting evidence to verify such a statement. 'Tis a puzzlement!

Reading and Learning

An understanding of the nature of the reading process and its relationship to the larger area of learning is mandatory for gaining clear perspectives upon which to base conclusions concerning the role of reading. Reading is seen today largely as a mechanical skill taught initially in first grade that has little to do with what has happened to the child the first six years of life.

There is little effort, if any, given to developing within the child some rationale for even participating in this thing called reading. The child, regardless of how we might ignore it, has learned a great deal about reading the world before entering school. If we look at reading in its broadest terms—giving meaning to objects, persons, and situations,—it becomes obvious that the child has been reading (learning) the first six years of his or her life. Do we make any effort to show children that the act of reading books is an extension of those experiences and give them time and planned activities whereby this concept could be assimilated? Usually, we do not—we have to get on with the "more important" reading skills.

Reading as Vicarious Experience

The act of reading when applied to learning is a vicarious experience. Ignorance of this concept causes a great deal of confusion and development of programs detrimental to good learning. Reading about picking oranges in Yuma, Arizona, does not give the child the experience of picking oranges. He simply reads *something* about picking oranges and is not able to utilize all the senses that would be functioning in the orange grove itself. Furthermore, experiential background with orange groves and related experiences would delimit or enrich the meaning given to the content, depending on the quality of the past experiences. In other words, the child experienced picking oranges vicariously; the quality of the reading experience depends upon the background children bring to the printed page.

Was the reading of any value? Only if the content was related to children's interest and helped them reach a goal or solve a problem. We might ask the question—was there a more realistic manner in which the child may have gained greater knowledge about picking oranges? Ideally, of course, the best learning would have been a real visit to the orange grove with the child actually picking oranges, all of the senses being stimulated and integrated to form a meaningful concept. As all children cannot live in the proximity of an orange grove, and if knowledge of orange pickers is deemed valuable by local curricula designers, it becomes necessary to turn to the use of vicarious experiences. Reading is only one of these and is too often used as the sole source of vicarious experience. The wide use of pictorial materials, varied discussion techniques, listening and writing activities are often neglected or given little attention in deference to reading materials. Good readers (even though they are cheated) gain some knowledge from the single vicarious experience of reading; the poor reader gains little, if any, and therefore fails to learn *because of reading*. In this type of situation, reading becomes the albatross that is ever present, invariably interfering with learning.

Reading and Expression of Ideas

Finally, the statement which will be seen by some as heretical—reading is *not* necessarily the most important thing we can teach a child. More and more it is becoming evident that reading is just one means of gaining knowledge, and not the panacea for learning. Reading is a "receiving" skill as is listening. Speaking and writing are "sending" skills. If one will think just a moment (or visit a classroom) and quickly tabulate the number of activities built around the receiving skills against the number of sending skill activities, it will be quite evident that sending skills take on the role of the stepchild. Both skills, listening and reading, imply passivity in learning which in turn is characteristic of many of our elementary classrooms. Listening is a skill we have, in the past, cast aside as not worthy of planned emphasis in the curriculum. It is encouraging today to see some signs that indicate we are recognizing the medium of listening as a learning skill of prime value, especially for the child who is not able to read well. Instead of receiving through the medium of reading, the child may get signals through listening activities.

Granted, the receiving skills of reading and listening are necessary for learning; however, the skills of expression are coming to be recognized as most advantageous with regard to enriched learning. The organization and expression of ideas is a characteristic of those people in this world who have made the most significant contributions. How many times is it said of a

great scientist, writer, or president of our country, "He was a great reader?" Usually, it is not whether he or she was a great reader but the degree of clarity with which they expressed ideas and the quality of those ideas. The fact is accepted that reading is a most influential source of ideas, but it is the reorganization, application, and expression of these ideas which is of greatest significance.

Is it "just natural" that writing is an unpleasant task for human beings? Why do we have so few people who appreciate a beautiful flow of language, either spoken or written? Instead of relaxing with a good book, why don't we relax through some type of language expression, such as composing a poem? Although there may be a myriad of considerations related to these questions, it is entirely possible that the main causative factor is the disregard for the two sending skills, speaking and writing, in early education. The writing and speaking which is done in classrooms is usually related to giving expected answers (in most cases requiring reading from a book) to teachers having little to do with divergent types of expression. In fact, many of the speaking and writing activities are designed in such a manner that expression becomes more convergent. The notion that there is one correct way of expressing ideas is reinforced almost daily through activities in spelling, writing, and speaking in which the child's responses are expected to comply with predetermined standards.

The disregard for the sending skills and lack of effort toward changing attitudes regarding these skills is the result of the "sacred cow" of reading. Expressive activities are seen as secondary to reading, the rationale being that reading is necessary for learning in school; and since this is so, expressive skills require only incidental attention. Not only is this rationale fallacious, it ignores the evidence of the relationship of the expressive skills and listening to reading.

Observation in first grade classrooms the first few months of school plainly reveals the dogged determination of teachers to get children to reading with almost complete disregard for the extent of language development. Listening skills, in most cases, are ignored completely, even in phonic oriented programs in which sound-symbol relationships are so important.

The Child's View of Reading

Reading then becomes a "sink or swim" proposition. It does not take the child too long to understand that learning to read is *the thing* in school. If children happen to come from a normal environment in which they have had those experiences which are necessary for success (learning to read) in school, they are successful (they have learned that which is deemed most important in school). They will have few problems in school as far as reinforcements are concerned, for they have found the magic key to open those portals of knowledge—"*book learning*!" Whether they learn that which is most relevant to their future ever-changing world is a debatable question dependent upon a multitude of variables.

Consider, however, the children who come from that environment in which they cannot learn the correct signals, an environment in which the required language is not developed, where early experiences are not compatible to the task of learning to read. Typically, this child is offered the same *opportunity* to learn to read, the same materials, and the same method as the child formerly described. What a perfect, although blatant, example of the manner so popular today for defending the *equality of education* in our democracy. This child is doomed to failure in school, not primarily

because of deprived experiential background, but because of the solidly entrenched idea that all children must be taught to read immediately and if they do not learn to read they will not learn. The latter phrase is true, of course, *because we guarantee it by designing a curricula which is reading-dominated, and therefore becomes the causative factor for many of our educational problems today.*

Rhetoric explaining the problems and failures of our society usually suffers from criticism because no recommendations for solving these problems are made. To avoid such a reprimand, I offer the following recommendations.

1. Efforts should be directed toward re-evaluating the relationship of reading to the total teaching-learning process. Colleges of Education and curriculum designers are in the most advantageous position for effecting change in this regard. It seems appropriate to investigate the use of technological advances in educational media and how the utilization of such media could supplement the assimilation of information now required through the medium of reading. With a look to the future, those concerned with curriculum would not be remiss in examining and redefining the goals of education to meet the challenge of that unforeseeable future in which the role of reading may be a far cry from what it is today.
2. Although this statement will be called "old hat" and cliche-worn, the child must be given precedence over the subject matter (in this case, reading). Reading programs have been suggested which range from ten-month old babies learning to read to speed-reading programs in first grade. All of them, without exception, ignore known factors such as social and emotional growth, perceptual development, meaningful learning and many other pertinent considerations. Learning environments filled with constant opportunity for stimulation of all kinds should be established and experimental evidence gathered as to the educational value of such learning environments. Can children learn to read in much the same fashion they learn to talk? Would reading be more meaningful and therefore more useful if it were allowed to develop naturally? Until we find some type of answer to these questions, it is entirely possible that we are encouraging and fostering inept instructional programs that limit learning.
3. Until some of these questions can be answered, consideration should be given to introducing language arts programs in which reading takes a lesser role than in the past, the emphasis being given mainly to speaking and writing with listening assuming the role of reading in the initial stage. Reading materials would be available to the student, but without the urgency to teach children to read them as in previous programs. Communication would be the hub around which the whole constellation of related language arts would revolve.
4. Study should be directed toward defining programs which consider not only how children are different but also how children are alike. Too many programs are on the scene today which claim to individualize instruction according to differences which in reality segregate children who have not learned to read on the pre-determined schedule. A program observed recently stressed that children from a certain ethnic group needed the prescribed printed materials because of the difference of that group to the norm group. It was implied that these children learn differently, that there was something almost mysterious about the manner in which they perceive their world. Granted there are differences relating to experiential background, language development, and social attitude; however, it is also true that these children possess common basic needs relating to physiological and social development and react in the same manner as other children to fulfilling these basic needs.

   All children, whether from the ghetto or middle America, still respond to situations which are physically satisfying and in which affiliation with other human beings is nurtured. Varied understandings on the part of teachers and curriculum designers are necessary in order that certain types of activities are introduced at the most beneficial time and in the most propitious manner. Mandatory for such decisions is knowledge dealing with principles of motivation, perception of self, sociological and philosophical concepts, and basic understandings of child development. The emphasis, therefore, is upon how to teach the child, drawing upon these knowledges, rather than teaching a reading program which precludes consideration of such knowledges.

The role of reading, especially in the elementary school, must be reconsidered and molded to improve the teaching-learning process. At present, reading *is* molding the teaching-learning process; in addition,

ironically, the present role of reading is inhibiting instead of stimulating reading. Reading, when seen in its proper perspective, is a most valuable tool for learning and vicarious experience. It can help us learn many things which are impractical to learn by any other means, helping us understand more about ourselves and the world in which we live. Accepting this, the statement made by Benjamin Franklin two centuries ago still gives us pause to contemplate: "Read much, but not too many books." He was trying to tell us even then that the real world was all around us and that *reading in its broadest terms* was learning to read that real world. It's been two hundred years. Isn't it about time we really thought about it?

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